

The Desert Shall Bloom:

A dialogue between experiences of
supporting trauma survivors and
Moltmann & Sölle's theologies
of suffering and hope



A little girl in the Woomera Immigration Detention Centre asked,
“Aren’t there any flowers in Australia?”
So the advocates sent masses of flowers to the detainees.
The desert bloomed.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

Following the Second World War, a theological re-examination of “suffering and hope” arose, led by authors such as Moltmann and Sölle; however, little has been written on the topic since the 1970s. Given this length of time, the question arose for me as to whether, in the light of a rapidly changing world, this past theology continues to provide a meaningful way of talking about suffering and hope. Would the reflections of contemporary Christians who have supported others in the depths of suffering have anything to add to how theologians explore the issue of suffering and hope?

In order to answer this, I decided to interview Australian Christians who had supported asylum seekers during a time of particularly severe immigration detention policies. Conditions experienced within Australia’s detention centres have contributed to the distress of already traumatised refugees; thus advocates who supported them have a unique experience of suffering and hope.

Drawing on phenomenology, a social research methodology that seeks to explore the meaning made out of experiences, I systematically reviewed themes arising from the reflections of some advocates and compared these themes alongside the theologies of Moltmann and Sölle.

The themes, many and varied in their scope, have been divided into three sections. The first section explores the issue of suffering, including the necessity for Christian theology to hold the darkness of life without turning too quickly towards hope, and the nature of sin and evil. In the second section, hope is explored starting with the question of whether it is permissible for theologians from a relatively privileged background to write about hope and progressing to explore Christian anthropology, compassion and forgiveness. Finally, I consider the question of what can be learnt from these reflections about the nature of God.

Acronyms

TPV	Temporary protection visa
PPV	Permanent protection visa
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
CCWA	Council of Churches of Western Australia
CARAD	Coalition for asylum seekers, refugees and detainees
CASE	Centre for Advocacy Support and Education for Refugees Inc.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Definitions

Asylum seeker	A person who has sought asylum but has not yet been granted refugee status.
Detainee	A person who is detained in an immigration detention facility. Mostly detainees were also asylum seekers, but could also include people with other visa and immigration offences.
Refugee	A person who has been formally recognised as having the right to seek asylum either under the refugee convention or the convention against torture. Whilst this may include people who have arrived in Australia on a permanent humanitarian visa, there is a focus on those who were granted a temporary protection visa on release from detention and therefore refugee generally refers to this group of people.

Acknowledgements

Given the interest in my research expressed by people I have come across in daily life, it would seem that the link between suffering and hope carries a universal resonance. I have had conversations about this theme in some of the most unlikely places, and the fact that people have been interested has given me energy to continue my work. While I do need to say thank you to the many people with whom I have had such conversations, there are of course a number of special people to mention.

Firstly, my sincere thanks to everyone who opened their lives to me by participating in the research. As I listened to your experiences during the interviews, I shared your laughter and tears and I became aware that for some people, the trauma of visiting the detention centres will continue to reverberate through your lives. It cannot have been easy to share such painful stories, particularly with someone you hardly knew and I am touched by your generosity in sharing your time and reflections with me to make this research possible.

Whilst travelling to conduct my research interviews, I was most appreciative of the offers of accommodation. My thanks go to Rev'd Sandy Boyce, Dr Jyoti Chaku and the Sisters of Mercy who not only gave me a place to stay but also fed me, assisted when needed with advice on getting around, and on occasions lent me what was needed to undertake the interviews. My particular thanks are to the Sisters of Mercy, whom I met for the first time as I arrived on the bus in their town.

Rev'd Marion Millin, Helen Morrell and Alison Atkinson-Phillips all spent considerable amounts of time proof-reading and giving feedback on my writing. Given the size of the thesis, it must have been a daunting job to read over it in its entirety, picking up the typographical mistakes and stray grammar, and making other suggestions.

Of course, none of this research would have been possible without the able assistance of my two supervisors, Rev'd Dr Alex Jensen and Emeritus Professor Patricia Harris. I know that this thesis has had its challenges and I sincerely appreciate the time and effort they have put into it and the chance to reflect on issues arising from my research with them both. To Alex, I thank you for sticking with my research even when it took you in directions radically different from your own theological perspective. I came to value the latter in that it also made me work harder to clarify my own understandings. To Trish, thank you for being there for me in some very dark times, especially when I was working through the impact on my own life of hearing the stories of traumatised people. Words cannot express what it meant to know that I had someone with whom I could share those struggles.

Finally, my thanks go to Rosemary Hudson-Miller and Greg Miller for keeping me in contact with the joys of life, especially when I was dealing with the darkness of my research.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Structure of the Thesis	6
2. METHODOLOGY	10
Experience as part of theology	10
Phenomenology as a research methodology	15
How the research was conducted	18
Participants	18
The Western Theologians	26
Analysis of Texts and Data	28
Reflections on the Study	31
3. A SUNBURNT COUNTRY	34
Introduction	34
In History's Page	34
Australian Refugee Policy	39
Refugee Convention	39
Responding to the Convention	45
Border Control and Human Rights	52
Softening the Hard Line	53
Conclusion	54
4. TRAUMA & SURVIVAL	56
Introduction	56
Effects of Torture	57
Immigration detention	60
Occupational Injustice	61
Access to mental health services	63
Temporary Protection	64
The Church's Practical Response	66
New society	69
To walk alongside	71
Helping voices be heard	73
Conclusion	75
5. THEOLOGY OF DARKNESS	78
Introduction	78
Dark night of the soul	79
In the black parts of life	83
6. SIN, SUFFERING AND THE EVIL OF THE WORLD	92
Introduction	92
Defining Sin	92
Death vs. Life	95
Sin in Relationships	98
The Evil of the World	102

Fermented Good	105
7. SUBVERTING THE SYSTEM	111
Introduction	111
A Political Theology	111
Theodicy and Justice	114
Living Differently	117
Resilience in the face of injustice	120
Determination to be different	122
Countercultural action	124
8. EASTER SATURDAY	130
Introduction	130
Moltmann's own Resurrection	130
Incarnation and suffering	132
Towards a new life	134
Towards the Resurrection	138
9. CAN WE TALK OF HOPE?	143
Introduction	143
Sölle on Hope	143
Hope in Suffering	144
Moltmann's Hope	146
Hope in Detention	150
What, then, can we say?	153
10. A COMMON HUMANITY	158
Introduction	158
Who are the human ones?	158
Humanity where there is none.	162
Made in the Image of God	166
11. THEOLOGY OF COMPASSION	171
Introduction	171
Love as Central to Hope	171
Compassion: With Passion	173
Connecting with Others	178
Towards Compassion	181
12. THE HOPE OF FORGIVENESS	187
Introduction	187
Forgiveness in Moltmann	187
Forgiveness from those who are hurt	189
Towards a Hopeful theology of Forgiveness	193
13. THE SUFFERING GOD	201
Introduction	201
Christ the Representative	201

Suffering Love	205
Christ of the Sinners	207
Absence of God	208
God in Detention	209
Where is God?	212
God needs us	215
 14. RELATIONSHIP IN GOD	 219
Introduction	219
Essential Relationship	219
Via Negativa	221
God as Community	222
God in Relationship	225
Changed relationships	227
A Reciprocal Relationship	229
 15. HOPE FROM GOD	 234
Introduction	234
A theological gap	234
Advocates & God's hope	237
God and the hope for our world	241
 16. REIGN OF GOD	 246
Introduction	246
God on Earth	246
The Human One	249
God's future	250
Theology of Promise	253
Kingdom of God	254
God alongside	255
The Reign on Earth	259
 17. CONCLUSION	 268
 APPENDIX I:	 278
Information for Advocates	
 APPENDIX II:	 280
Consent Form	
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 281

Introduction

The classic response of theologians to civil disorder and corrupt government has been to ignore such temporal concerns and to get on with God's business. It is encapsulated in the stories about the monastic theologians in the West. In the midst of the pillage and murder, the destruction of villages and monasteries, that accompanied great movements of populations and civil unrest, they kept working, trying to understand and reproduce the thought of the great theologians of the early church. The events of their day were marginal to their theology, which was concerned to interpret the texts that grounded the faith necessary if people were to be faithful in such a world.¹

How does one speak of God and hope in a world where there is suffering and evil? My feeling at the start of this research was that a theology of suffering and hope has to stand up to the reflections of the lived experiences of those who have been present in the depths of suffering. Contemporary theologies of suffering and hope arose in response to the events that occurred at Auschwitz and other concentration camps in the Second World War. This theme has arisen throughout human history, yet it was the events of the Second World War that prompted a radical rethinking of past explanations. This rethinking influenced later theologians, such as Sölle, who wrote about suffering and drew her reflections from her practical engagement with the oppressed peoples of the world. It is now a generation since Sölle and her colleagues explored their responses to evil in the world and little work has been done since then. In the meantime, the world has changed. No longer do we face the worship of the evolutionary principle of progress; constant progress marching towards a self-made utopia. Rather, we face the possibility of nuclear and/or climactic extinction. We now live in an age where communication is virtually instant and where, with a bit of determination, ordinary people can share information even under the most repressive regimes, albeit still

¹ Andrew Hamilton SJ, "Theology after Woomera", *Interface* 5, no. 2 (2002), p. 111

with some risk. Australia has faced its own questions of evil most recently with asylum seekers arriving by boat who looked towards a safe country and instead found systematic abuse and inhumane conditions.

With all these changes since World War II, the question arose for me as to whether the theologies of suffering and hope that were developed out of the experiences of the Second World War were still relevant to people suffering today. Given the Western world's experiences of suffering have been limited since the Second World War, I queried whether the theologies of suffering and hope developed by Western theologians still had relevance for people who are in the midst of suffering? Therefore, I decided to explore this issue through the contemporary stories and experiences of Christians who had supported asylum seekers in detention or refugees on temporary protection visas, mostly during the middle years (2000 – 2005) of the Howard Government. With the harshness of the detention centres and the ongoing uncertainty of only having temporary protection, the people who had supported refugees and asylum seekers certainly knew what it was to be with people in very despairing times. The situation for refugees will be explored in further detail in chapters three and four.

What an amazingly diverse group of people found their ways into the detention centres across Australia in the early 2000s to simply be there with those who came seeking asylum! Each one had a unique story to tell and often the interview for this research was their first opportunity to tell it to a wider audience. There were young women who got involved with issues of justice at university; grandparents who adopted young adult asylum seekers as a second family; and Larry, a man in his 80s who was riveted by a speech of Catholic priest, lawyer and activist, Father Frank Brennan, and galvanised his anger into action to change the lives of the refugees around him. Advocates came from a variety of churches;² they were

² Here I must add that there were many supporters of other faiths and even of no faith, but being a thesis in Christian theology my interviews were with those who identified themselves as Christian.

both lay and ordained and from all manner of theologies. Some had been hurt by their churches as a result of their involvement with refugees. What they all had in common was their passion for making the lives of those who were suffering better and doing whatever it took to make that difference.

Their reflections on suffering and hope are compared and contrasted with the reflections of Western theologians. After the research for my honours thesis examining suffering and hope in the context of disability, I felt there was little I could add to that which I had written previously on contemporary theologies of suffering and hope. Because of this I decided to focus on some of the more influential Western theologians who have written on the topic, namely Moltmann and Sölle. In the methodology I will explain my choice and use of Moltmann and Sölle as my conversation partners with the advocates; however it must be acknowledged at this point that there were many areas in which their ideas converged with those of the advocates. Some of the great themes of theology, such as the centrality of love and what life means, occur in the texts of Moltmann and Sölle as well as in the conversations I had with advocates. However, there were also points at which the conversation between these voices brought up differing issues about which little had previously been written in contemporary Western theology. It was these areas that extended and even on occasions challenged the writings of Moltmann and Sölle. Indeed, I found these points to be the more interesting part of my work. I hope the reader does not view this thesis as deconstructing the whole of either Moltmann or Sölle's theologies, for this was certainly not intended and it is only a limited reading based on my reflections about the themes that emerged from the research. Instead, I hope my work will seek to identify gaps where the new generation of theological minds can seek to rediscover the relevance of suffering and hope to our changed world.

This congregation taught me ‘the shared theology of all believers’, the theology of the people. Unless academic theology continually turns back to this theology of the people, it becomes abstract and irrelevant. For the fact is that theology is not just something for theological specialists; it is a task laid on the whole people of God, all congregations and every believer.³

In a thesis drawing on people’s stories it is important to declare who I am as my voice will be heard throughout the text. I make no apology for this: any theology is done in a given context and whilst I am drawing on the contexts of other people, I am also drawing on my own. I have grown up in a Uniting Church congregation where social justice was important, so I have been immersed and inspired by members of the congregation doing the seemingly extraordinary in the name of God and justice. It was from this congregation that I went to work for a year in a polio hostel in India. I met women contemplating suicide so their family could eat, as well as small children who wanted to stay at the hostel for the school holidays so they would not be a financial burden on their families. To call that experience life changing is an understatement and it would be a whole other thesis to explore the impact that being immersed in a developing country has on one’s faith. Before going to India I had trained as an Occupational Therapist and the influence of that training will be seen through the background section of the thesis. After India, I studied theology with the aim of finding a space in which to bring the practicality of occupational therapy together with theology. I have also been a member of the Uniting Church’s Social Justice Commission,⁴ and currently am chair of Uniting International Mission, which builds relationships with overseas churches in practical ways for the Western Australian Synod.

Over the years, many of my friends were involved in supporting refugees in and out of detention; some did this as volunteers whilst others were in official positions, typically within

³ Jürgen Moltmann. *A broad place: An autobiography*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 59

⁴ Now Social Justice Board

church organisations. For the last few years (2003–2006) of the Howard Government, I was involved in the Uniting Church’s Social Justice Commission. Because of this, there are elements of the background to my thesis that I know about as a result of being there. Not all of these elements can be referenced, because in many cases there was little record other than a minute in a meeting that I attended — and occasionally it was a conversation that was deliberately not minuted at the time. I have attempted to reference as much as possible but, where necessary, I have had to leave some parts unreferenced to anything except my own experiences and recollections of the time spent challenging government and community opinions and creating friendships with refugees and asylum seekers.

A further point worth making is that, as a feminist, I use the term “reign of God” in preference to the “kingdom of God”. Moltmann, however, uses the latter term and therefore although I mostly use the reign of God, where I am referring to Moltmann’s writing I retain his “kingdom” phrase. I am conscious that use of the word “kingdom” not only reinforces the masculine stereotype for God but also the autocratic and hierarchical models that are still prevalent in some theologies. Additionally, when referring to Moltmann’s theology, I will use his terminology, including that of “Father, Son and Spirit.”

Finally, in spite of academic convention, there are some points in this thesis in which I have used the first person point of view. I struggled with the idea of it; however, there are points in which I felt I needed my voice to be particularly visible and it is at these times that I have used the first person point of view. I have limited this to the introduction of chapters and the points at which I have reflected on the dialogues between the voices of Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates.

Scattered through the thesis there is poetry, extended quotes and reflections that were written about the detention centres both from those inside the centres and those who were supporters.

I hope this will continue to draw you back to the reality faced by the speakers in this thesis and their friends. I have also included my own poetry that was written at significant points of my working through these issues. It was one of my ways of coping with the darkness of the stories I was hearing and also shows my personal journey with the question of how we speak of God in a suffering world.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into four sections. The first section includes the methodology and provides the background of the social and historical context in which the interviews took place. Particularly for the overseas reader, the two background chapters present information about the situation in which advocates were supporting asylum seekers and refugees and thus illustrates the importance that advocates' reflections can have for a theology of suffering and hope.

The subsequent three sections will deal with the major thematic material of the thesis: a section on suffering, hope and understandings of God. Each of the chapters represents an area in which there is a discrepancy between what Moltmann and/or Sölle has written on the topic and the reflections of the refugee supporters. In some cases, neither author had written on the topic being explored; in other chapters there is a discrepancy of nuance. It is important at this point to reiterate that there are points of congruence, but since the aim is to develop further a theology of hope, the focus of this thesis is on the areas where the reflections of advocates extend or further challenge the writings of either Moltmann and/or Sölle. Generally, the writings of Moltmann and Sölle are explored in the first two sections of the chapter, followed by the reflections of advocates. The final part of each chapter is a conversation between the voices presented in the chapter with the aim of gaining a deeper

understanding of the issues involved. This structure varies on occasions, particularly where one of the authors has not written about the topic at hand.

Background to the Thesis



Countryside near Baxter Immigration Detention Centre

Methodology
A Sunburnt County
Trauma & Survival

And I was really affected by these stories because I have this whole group of male Copts who have been raped by the police [in their country of origin] and just, it's just horrific. And they recently, because they are Copts and then on top of that the government [in Australia] doesn't believe it. And the frustration of how do I get the information? The church is too scared to say anything over there. It's very hard to get information out of the country because the Bishops in the church won't say very much and the [Australian] government won't listen to groups like the Coptic organization in America are producing heaps of stuff. But they say these allegations have been made but they can't prove them. Even the immigration people are saying there's no evidence that the police didn't protect them and I'm like they're making claims of rape, but there is no evidence, but they will say well they haven't had medicals. These are people who come into the country we're the first person that they've ever, ever told that this has happened to.

Caroline

Methodology

Experience as part of theology

Interpretation of Christian scriptures and therefore of theology has been an on-going pursuit that has altered significantly over the last 2,000 years. Although each era has had its own preferred technique, it has been the concept of the hermeneutical circle that has articulated most clearly the elements that contribute to the strategies for interpretation regardless of the specific approach used.

The hermeneutical circle, as outlined by Padilla, attempts to articulate what a reader brings to the text in interpreting it. Whilst different aspects are included in differing disciplines, in theology the hermeneutical circle is acknowledged to include Scripture, tradition, historical contexts and the reader's experiences (Figure 1)¹ Hence it acknowledges that experience does alter the theological interpretation of scripture and doctrine regardless of whether or not the interpreter is aware of this.

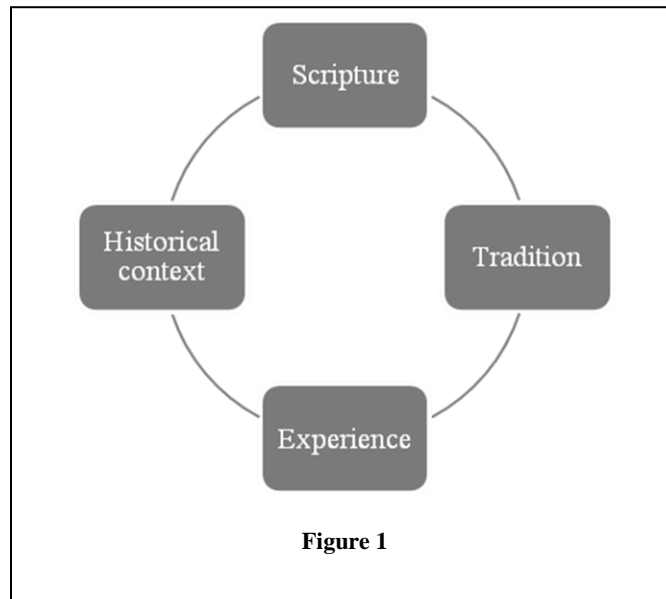
This connection between theology and human experience is not an isolated concept. Indeed, Tracy suggests that the reflection on common human experience is the fundamental task of theology.² Experience, therefore, is integral to theology and influences its interpretation as much as theology will influence one's interpretation of one's experiences. Indeed, as Palmer points out, "meaning and meaningfulness, then, are

¹ C. Rene Padilla, "The interpreted world: Reflections on contextual hermeneutics", *Themelios* 7, no. 1 (1982), p. 22

² David Tracy, "The task of fundamental theology", *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 1 (1974), p. 13

contextual.”³ It is therefore impossible to separate the meaning of the biblical text without examining the contexts in which such meaning is made.

It is both the parts and the whole that needs to be examined in order to create a full understanding,⁴ in this case of theology. Each element creates a greater synergy, yet the final whole is greater than the totality of its component parts.⁵ A dialogue takes place between the elements of the circle, which like any dialogue involves listening to the wisdom that can arise from the differing aspects. No one part of the circle holds the final answer as it is only collectively that a greater understanding can be developed.



This connection between experience and theology is also found in the area of practical theology and in particular in theological reflection. Theological reflection involves

³ Richard E. Palmer. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology & existential philosophy. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 118

⁴ Ronald Bontekoe. *Dimensions of the hermeneutic circle*. (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1996), p. 2

⁵ Palmer. *Hermeneutics*, p. 118

exploring the connections between the concrete, lived experiences of an individual or group and the biblical story in a way that seeks to broaden understanding of the issues involved both in the biblical story and in the person's experiences.⁶ It needs to be engaged with in an attitude of exploration: to be too certain about the tradition or experience risks simply affirming one's own prejudices.⁷

In theological reflection, it is argued that to take a standpoint of certainty "misses God's dynamic action in present human experience."⁸ That is to say that God can continue to speak to humanity today in new ways, and whilst experience should not be discounted in seeking understanding of God, it also has a role to play in the interpretation of the experiences. Indeed, theological reflection aims to open the reflector to a new openness and a new insight into the scriptures.^{9, 10}

My use of experience to develop a systematic theology is not a new approach. Both Moltmann and Sölle, the theologians explored in this thesis, have drawn their experiences into their theologies. In writing about hope, Moltmann frequently draws on his experiences in the Second World War.¹¹ Sölle, on the other hand, is more systematic in her drawing on experience and uses the approach of other liberation theologians, using

⁶ Robert L. Kinast. *What are they saying about theological reflection?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 1

⁷ Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer. *The art of theological reflection*. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), p. 3

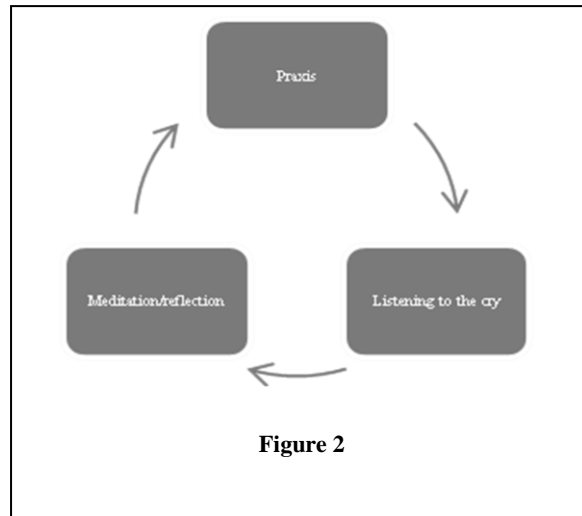
⁸ Ibid., p. 8

⁹ John E. Paver. *Theological reflection and education for ministry: The search for integration in theology*. (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub., 2006), p. 37

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 37

¹¹ For example in Jürgen Moltmann. *Experiences in theology: Ways and forms of Christian theology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 3ff

the praxis-reflection cycle (see Figure 2).¹² Indeed, for Sölle, the connection between theology and experience is so interwoven that she suggests, “Biblical texts are best read with a pair of glasses made out of today’s newspapers.”¹³ Therefore engagement in the experiences of the world is integral to the theologies of both Moltmann and Sölle.



Is it, then, so much of a leap to systematically take the experiences of other people and insert these into the hermeneutical circle? Certainly social research methods develop the proposition that there is a need to set aside (bracket) one’s own experiences in order to understand the experience of the other.¹⁴ Failure to do so, results in simply projecting one’s own interpretations onto the phenomena being studied.¹⁵ Without bracketing one’s own experience, the hermeneutical circle is limited to the experiences of a particular privileged class: people who are, in the world context, wealthy and educated enough to

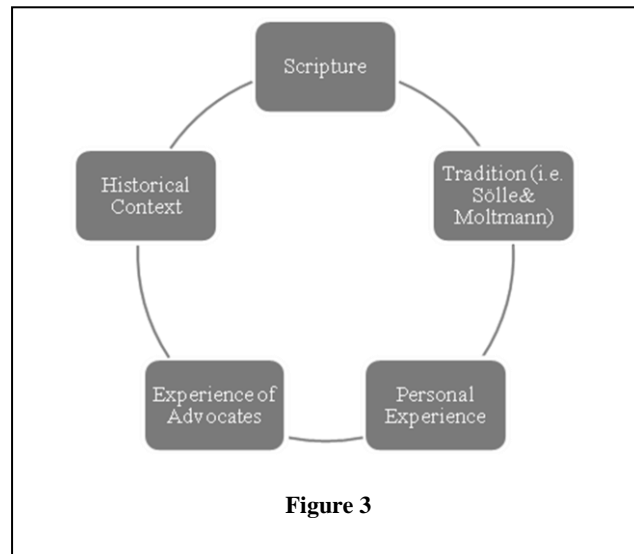
¹² Dorothee Sölle. *On Earth as in heaven: A liberation spirituality of sharing*. Translated by Marc Matko. 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. x ff

¹³ Dorothee Sölle. *The strength of the weak: Toward a Christian feminist identity*. Translated by Rita Kimber and Robert kimber. 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 155

¹⁴ Conal Hamill and Helen Sinclair, "Bracketing - practical considerations in Husserlian phenomenological research," *Nurse Researcher* 17, no. 2 (2010), p. 17

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 17

pursue a career in academia. Contextual theologies have long drawn on lived experience as a way of adding to theological wisdom;¹⁶ the difference here is that I am doing this systematically using the resources given by social research methods. When reflecting on the way in which the hermeneutical circle is used in this thesis, I suggest it is as shown in Figure 3.



Not only will the theological reflections on the experiences of advocates be added to the circle, but also academic thought will be represented by the writings of Moltmann and Sölle. The rationale for the choice of these two authors will be explained below. Naturally my own lived experience will also have a place in the dialogue. Social scientists speak of “bracketing experience” (setting aside own experiences).¹⁷ I have attempted to do this as my reporting of the reflections of advocates demonstrates. Yet in interpreting these stories and creating the dialogue between the theologians and

¹⁶ R Lassalle-Klein, "Jesus of Galilee and the crucified people: The contextual christology of Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (2009), p. 348

¹⁷ Poul Lübcke, "A semantic interpretation of Husserl's Epoche," *Synthese* 118, no. 1 (1999), p. 1

advocates, my own reflections not only helped decide where to give the priority, but also helped develop a final interpretation that draws on both sides of the conversation.

Phenomenology as a research methodology

Husserl, the creator of modern phenomenology, was a German philosopher and mathematician in the early years of the 20th Century who sought to find a scientific method that could be applied to philosophy.¹⁸ This meant that for a philosophical truth to be made there had to be sufficient evidence to justify the truth.¹⁹ With his new approach to philosophy, Husserl began lecturing on the “general theory of knowledge,” with these lectures later becoming one of his most important early works on phenomenology.²⁰ Husserl attempted to take Descartes’ thoughts further than had been done previously. Whilst Descartes had the certainty “that consciousness exists,”²¹ Husserl’s view was that “it is not only our *knowledge* of the existence of consciousness... which is absolute, but that existence itself.”²² The interpretation of the experiences of consciousness is left to the individual. In his writings on phenomenology, Husserl attempted to explore the philosophy of that existence.

Phenomenology is a philosophical framework that attempts to understand the lived world of individuals in regards to a particular phenomenon, in this case suffering and hope. It is this framework that underpins its research methodology. As such, phenomenology seeks

¹⁸ Michael Hammond, Jane Howarth, and Russell Keat. *Understanding phenomenology*. (Cambridge: B. Blackwell, 1991), p. 18

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 20

²⁰ Lee Hardy, "Translator's introduction," in *The idea of phenomenology* (Dordrecht ; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1999), p. 1

²¹ Andre Orianne, "Translator's foreword," in *The theory of intuition in Husserl's phenomenology* (Evanston Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. xiii

²² Ibid. p. xiii, emphasis in original.

to examine how the world is experienced by individuals through listening to their stories.

Indeed, as Husserl, the creator of modern phenomenology, reflects:

The task of the phenomenological critique of knowledge, then, is to identify, analyse, and describe the various ramified systems of presentation and representation correlated to the various kinds of possible objectivities, and in doing so, identify the forms of evidence which serve to justify belief in the existence and determinations of the objectives so given.²³

In order to do this, it treats the experiences of the individuals as valid; one's experience is reality for oneself, rather than there being a universal objective interpretation.²⁴ This approach allows for the individual stories to be heard and therefore is able to extract multiple meanings of a phenomenon. Husserl suggested, "There is nothing by way of "*objective*" validity about these statements [about experiences of a phenomenon]. They have no "*objective sense*"; they have only a "*subjective*" truth."²⁵ Hence phenomenology focuses on the perceptions that surround a particular experience.²⁶

Additionally, the contexts in which stories occur are critical for the understanding of the people and the meaning that they place on their experiences.²⁷ Hence, the interpretation placed by one person on a particular event is likely to be different to the interpretation of another.

²³ Edmund Husserl. *The idea of phenomenology*. Translated by Lee Hardy. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), p. 9

²⁴ Ibid., p. 34

²⁵ Ibid., p. 36

²⁶ Edmund Husserl. *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*. Translated by Ted E. Klein and William E Pohl. 3 vols. (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1980), p. 35

²⁷ Bryan Turner, "The Blackwell companion to social theory," In *Blackwell companions to sociology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), <http://0-www.netlibrary.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=44993>, p. 273

More specifically, phenomenology looks to describe the phenomena that make up daily life. “It is a world of phenomena that have no clearly defined limits and are not mathematically precise; they are full of ‘almost’ and ‘so to speak,’ obeying the vague laws that are expressed by the word ‘normality’.”²⁸ It seeks to look at the ordinary through the eyes of strangeness in order to delve reflectively into the meanings associated with the phenomena.²⁹

At the same time, the principle concern of phenomenology is to describe the experiences, whilst any analysis is secondary.³⁰ It asks, “What is the experience of this particular phenomenon?” In the case of the thesis, the phenomenon being studied the experience of supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. This connection between action and reflection is also critical to phenomenology. Cho suggests, “In the living flow of ordinary life, man primarily loses himself in actions, and only secondarily and inadequately reflects.”³¹ Thus in the ordinary course of studying a phenomenon, those participating in the research are engaging in the action and it is the researcher’s task to reflect upon those actions.

Unlike the hermeneutic circle, for phenomenology it is experience which is the key starting point. Phenomenological research aims to, “present the experiences in a way that

²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas. *The theory of intuition in Husserl's phenomenology*. Translated by Andre Orianne, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology & existential philosophy. (Evanston [Ill.]: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 24

²⁹ Maurice Natanson, "Phenomenology as rigorous science," in *Phenomenology and sociology: Selected readings*, ed. Thomas Luckmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 182

³⁰ Thomas Luckmann, "Preface," *Ibid.*, p. 8

³¹ Kah Kyung Cho, "Introduction: Phenomenology as rigorous philosophy in theory and practice," in *Philosophy and science in phenomenological perspective*, ed. Kah Kyung Cho (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984), p. xiii

is *faithful to the original*,³² so this presentation becomes more important than even the analysis of the reflections. Phenomenology therefore aims to reconstruct the reality presented by individuals and the meaning made of those experiences.

However, I believe that phenomenology can be used in conjunction with theological reflection and the hermeneutical circle in order to gain further insight into the scriptures and theology. Phenomenology allows for the systematic exploration of experience and hence enables the theological researcher to create a dialogue between the experiences of others and theology. Without deliberately drawing on others' experiences, development of theology is limited, consciously or otherwise, to the experiences in which academic theologians engage. Thus the experiences of one group (i.e. academically minded people who have the ability to pursue study) become the "norm" within the theological cannon of human life.

By systematically listening to the stories of marginalised people, theologians are able to broaden the perspectives of their examination of theologies and, in so doing, theology becomes relevant for a broader group of people. This is certainly not the same as allowing experience to dictate theology but, rather, it does allow for a fuller examination of the question of how God is experienced in the world today.

How the research was conducted

Participants

Selection

My original research proposal was to interview Christian refugees from the Middle East.

However, due to the small numbers of Christian refugees, the risk of retraumatisation,

³² Martyn Denscombe. *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects*. 2nd ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), p. 98, emphasis in original

and the on-going difficulty many had with the English language, this proved to be difficult. Therefore, I decided instead to interview Christians who had supported refugees in detention or on temporary protection visas, because this group of people had accompanied refugees of all faiths during their difficult times. In addition, many of the advocates had had little opportunity to tell their stories and experience the healing that such story telling can create; later feedback was that this experience was very much appreciated by advocates.

These advocates were contacted through a variety of means. Some were known through my personal networks in social justice in the Perth churches; others were contacted through people suggesting particular congregations that had been involved in working with refugees. Interviews were also conducted in Adelaide, Port Augusta, Whyalla and Sydney during an intensive three-week research trip. Whilst a small number of these interviews had been set up before the trip by contacting congregations, the greater part of the interviews were arranged by word of mouth and even by advocates hearing about the research and asking to tell their stories. In total, 48 interviews were conducted, with some interviewees requesting that they be interviewed in couples due to time constraints. Of these, 46 interviews have been used in the research; one advocate did not return the consent form, possibly due to on-going mental health issues and homelessness, and a further interviewee did not meet the selection criteria since he had only worked with refugees who had arrived in Australia on humanitarian visas.

Advocates came from a wide variety of backgrounds and ranged in age from 23 to 80 years. Their faith story varied: some had returned to the church during their time working with refugees, whereas others had been long-term members of the church. The

interviews were conducted with both lay and ordained people, Catholic sisters and the head of a church who had a PhD in theology. Some of the lay people had also studied theology at University. Additionally, the theological backgrounds of advocates ranged from those from very “liberal” backgrounds to those who described themselves as “evangelical.”

Ethics Clearance

I obtained ethics clearance from the Murdoch University Ethics Committee to conduct interviews with a small number of participants for this study. The Committee is guided by the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* and adheres to the *Statement's* standards. The Committee requires researchers to adhere to standards of gaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, maintaining privacy, protection of participants from harm and courtesy towards the participants.³³ These requirements were addressed in the application. Participants were given information about the study and its aims and the broad areas of interview questions in an initial letter (Appendix I). In line with the Committee's protocols, I undertook to reiterate these principles at the start of the interview and inform participants they could withdraw at any point during the interview. I also made provision for participants to request the interview be a series of shorter discussions. Informed consent was gained from the participants prior to the start of the interviews. In addition, I informed the Committee that counselling was available from ministers outside the participant's congregation if requested, however, this was not needed. The Ethics Committee gave its initial approval

³³ <http://www.research.murdoch.edu.au/ethics/hrec/codes.html>

to interview the refugees themselves, which was later amended to interview the refugee supporters. This approval was granted for three years.

In a large scale research project such as this it is common to use numbers to identify the individuals who have taken part in the interviews. However, I have elected to use pseudonyms instead. In the immigration detention centres, asylum seekers were allocated numbers and even when the children were to receive Christmas presents from community members, they were called up by these numbers. One advocate related how when a young woman gave birth to her child, she was asked by a guard if the child had yet been given a number. The inhumanity of the detention system was compounded by the depersonalisation of those caught up in it, an experience highlighted by this use of numbers, not names. It is because of this that I have decided to allocate pseudonyms to the interviewees. They too suffered trauma because of the immigration detention centres and for some there has been little opportunity to tell their stories. Like the asylum seekers, advocates need to be seen as human beings. For those advocates who are in official roles of ministry with their church, I have used the title “Rev.”³⁴ I am using this generically regardless of their official titles as a way of differentiating between those whose work has included reflecting theologically on the issues at hand and lay people, who are less likely to have done so.

The Interviews

Advocates were people who were sensitive to the immediate needs of others. Therefore it was hardly surprising that national events around the time of the majority of my research

³⁴ The advocates in official ministry have included Catholic sisters and priests, Uniting Church Ministers of the Word and Deacons and one person with the title Rev. Dr.

interviews also affected the responses of advocates to issues of suffering and hope. Immediately prior to my arrival in Adelaide, South Australia had one of its worst heat-waves on record and the electricity supply across the South East of Australia was shut down due to the system overheating. This resulted not only in severe discomfort for healthy people, but several deaths amongst the elderly and people with disabilities were attributed to the heat. The response of the community appeared to me nothing short of amazing. People were asked to check on their neighbours, particularly the elderly, to make sure they were alright. The train station was opened day and night so the homeless could have access to air conditioning and showers were also made available to the homeless so they had another opportunity to cool off. All over Adelaide, there was a renewed feeling of community and care for all members of society.

After a week and a half of extremely hot and dry weather in the South East of Australia, the unthinkable happened: the Black Saturday bushfires. In the mountainous terrain in Victoria on a day when Melbourne reached over 46°C with winds of over 100km per hour, fires started from a variety of sources, and included those that were deliberately lit. The summer had been long and dry, so the fires raced through the undergrowth surprising the small communities dotted through the bush land. Exploding trees sent the fire front racing ahead and the shape of the landscape meant that few people saw the smoke with enough time to leave safely. Many of those who attempted to save their homes died in the inferno. Others, who fled, did not make it to safety. In total, 173 people died on that day.

Once again, the community response was nothing short of incredible. Those who had suffered not long before in the floods in Queensland donated their disaster relief money

to the people who had lost everything in the bushfires. The Australian and even the international community rallied to give support. Professional bodies found ways of assisting the survivors and everyone did what they could. On Black Saturday I was having a day off. I drove to the Flourier Peninsula to escape the heat and enjoy the first of the cool breezes for a week. The scenery was magnificent, although many of the national parks were closed due to the fire danger. On returning, I heard about the bushfires. It took me several days to find out that a close friend living in the fire ravaged area had made it to safety.

The response of the churches to Black Saturday was varied. All the churches found ways to give support and many also had special liturgies that were used on the Sunday a week after the fires. However, the day after the bushfires the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney gave a “hell fire and brimstone” sermon, as it was described to me by an advocate. Apparently, he had literally threatened the people with the fires of hell. Even if it had been written before the bushfires, the advocate reflected, it should have been changed because of the victims. There was enough time to do that. Not surprisingly, reflections on the bushfires became important in the later interviews.

The interviews themselves varied according to the needs of advocates. Whilst many of the Perth interviews were conducted in comfortable lounge rooms, the Eastern States interviews were not. Occasionally an office would be used, or a discussion around the dining room table after dinner. More usually it was a cafe that varied from decent to noisy. One interview was even done in a pub because the office air conditioning was not working in the heat-wave and this was the coolest place to hand. However, advocates were able to suggest a place for the interview and, where possible, I travelled to them.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used (Appendix II). This interview schedule was developed based on the questions that are typically posed during theological reflection. The interview questions were a starting point for the discussion. I assured advocates that whatever they spoke about would have some relevance, so not to worry whether they had answered the interview questions. On occasions I would then need to ask a question a second time. Use of a semi-structured interview meant that whilst there was direction to the interview, it was also possible to explore topics of importance as they arose. This allowed advocates to reflect on what they felt to be of importance, arising from their experience of supporting asylum seekers and refugees. Advocates were encouraged to draw on their wealth of experiences to reflect on the questions at hand; as a result many of them did not limit their responses to their time with the refugees and asylum seekers.

The interviews varied in length from between 30 minutes and 3 hours. Some of the advocates requested a break in the interview because it touched on topics that were upsetting; however, these were in the minority. Only one interview was not actually completed. In part this was because the issues involved were still very raw for the advocate; my own fatigue may also have been an influence. The analysis of the interviews is discussed below (see page 28).

The research process also involved a personal journey, particularly during the time of intensive research interviews. In many ways, the Perth interviews were easy. Often I knew the people, or at least knew of them, and there were days or even weeks between them to reflect on the interviews and the stories told. Most of the people in Perth had supported the refugees once they had been released from detention, so their stories were

full of hope, even when the threat of a deportation on the expiry of their three-year temporary protection visa remained. In contrast many of those interviewed in Adelaide had visited the Baxter detention centre, which is four hours from Adelaide. The centres had been deliberately built to discourage asylum seekers from continuing their refugee status claim (see chapter 3); therefore the stories that came from these centres included the utter despair that was prevalent in the detention centres. This affected me personally and was exacerbated by the intensity of the interview experience. In order to make the time to interview all those wanting to tell me their story, I had to work long days with little time off. The situation was intensified when I visited the towns near Baxter. Not only had the people there visited much more frequently (often weekly or more often), as was typical for country areas, there were few services available to the people. Much of the debriefing of the advocates was done by the Catholic sisters who were living in the town and supporting both asylum seekers and advocates.

By the time I arrived in Sydney, I was exhausted and disoriented. I have never particularly liked large cities and being tired made it all the worse. One of the first advocates I spoke to talked of the disorientation the refugees faced coming to a new city, especially after being released from immigration detention where everything is small and highly regulated. This not only put my feelings into perspective, but also gave me insight into the experiences of the refugees. One further incident during this time bears noting. I had interviewed an advocate who had supported asylum seekers from China and who detailed the torture of some of those asylum seekers that had prompted their flight to Australia. This included allegations of the complicity of the Australian Government in deporting a man who was likely to face further torture. In the busy environment of

central Sydney there were few quiet places to go in order for me to process this information except, somewhat ironically, the Chinese garden.

The Western Theologians

With my honours thesis having explored aspects of suffering and hope, and having completed a literature review for that, I felt there was little I could add to a general discussion of the theological literature on these issues. After some discussion with my supervisors, it was decided instead to focus on the literature of a few key Western theologians who have written about suffering and hope. My original intention was to examine the writing of contemporary theologians. In order to identify suitable authors, I searched the American Theological Library Association's (ATLA) religion database with the key words of “suffering” or “hope.” This generated a list of 10,000 articles and book reviews and I searched through these in order to identify the authors of relevant articles. By the time I had reviewed the first 5,000 titles and/or abstracts, which ranged in date from 1980 to the present, I realised that no two relevant articles had the same author. Therefore I decided to use Moltmann, although I thought he had written little about hope since the 1970s, as he was one of the most referenced names in theology with regard to hope. Subsequent to that decision, I discovered he had resumed writing about hope in more recent years.

Identifying a second author was somewhat more difficult. I decided I would examine only Western authors because I wanted to critique the theology arising from my own culture.³⁵ However, this ruled out many of the liberation theologians. Sölle was initially

³⁵ It must of course be clearly stated that there are many non-Western authors who have written about suffering and hope from a wide variety of traditions including Kazuo Kitamori. *Theology of the pain of God*.

ruled out as a possibility because one supervisor felt she was too close to Moltmann. In many ways she is both carried the guilt of being German in the Second World War and both are Protestants with a passion for social justice. Even so, there are clear differences in their work and thought, symbolised for me in their long-running but apparently amicable dispute over the meaning of the crucifixion. However, the difficulty in finding Western theologians who had written sufficiently on the issue of suffering and hope meant I needed to return to her writings.

Sölle proved an excellent balance point to Moltmann. Not only do they engage with similar issues from remarkably different perspectives, but they also dialogue with each other through their books. Indeed, Moltmann's focus on hope is strongly influenced by the writing of Ernst Bloch³⁶ whereas Sölle's focus is suffering arising from her depth of engagement with the suffering people of the world. Sölle is reluctant to identify the feminist concerns as a form of suffering in case it takes away from the suffering of other people; Moltmann, whilst aware of his privilege, attempts to deliberately cross the divides that separate him from the oppressed. Whilst they have many areas of agreement, they also have as many areas of disagreement.

In exploring the work of Moltmann and Sölle, I only draw lightly on secondary texts. There are two reasons for this occurring. Firstly, my focus is not so much on what they have written, but rather on suffering and hope. Their writings form a major part of the work on this topic. Secondly, whilst there has been extensive writing on Moltmann's

1st British ed. (London,; S.C.M. Press, 1966), D.K. Suh. *The Korean Minjung in Christ*: Wipf and Stock, 2000) and E. Suleeman. *Bergumul dalam pengharapan: buku penghargaan untuk pvt. eka darmaputra. struggling in hope*: Bpk Gunung Mulia, 1999).

³⁶ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 97

work, there has been very little on Sölle. Indeed, a search of the Library of Congress catalogue revealed only one book about Sölle's work that was in English. I felt that had I incorporated too much of the commentators on Moltmann, it would skew the thesis and hence I chose only to draw on a few of the works about him.

Analysis of Texts and Data

Social science research methodologies demand a rigour that includes the potential for another researcher to use the same techniques and derive similar responses. Thus a description of the methods, including programmes, that were used to analyse the data is imperative. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were placed into NVivo. NVivo is a computer programme that enables the organisation and analysis of qualitative data in order to model concepts and compare the appearance of particular codes. It helps to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis. Each interview was coded for the main themes and this coding was randomly checked by my supervisor with complete agreement. Queries were then run to examine the frequency of each code appearing alongside the concepts of suffering, hope and God.

Similarly, the works of both Sölle and Moltmann were read for excerpts that reflected on the major themes of the thesis. These quotations were copied into NVivo and coded using the same methods as the interviews. Where necessary, additional coding terms were added and therefore the coding did not necessarily match with the coding for the interviews. Like the interviews, a query was run to identify the frequency of occurrence of each code in relation to the major themes.

These tables of frequency of coding were then used to generate mind-maps that reflected the concepts that each voice spoke about in conjunction with the major themes.³⁷ Typically there were codes that appeared significantly more frequently than others, and therefore these became the major sub-themes, with the less frequently occurring codes being a second level of each sub-theme. The groupings of the coding were then checked by running a query for each voice to examine the frequency of occurrence of each code against all other codes. The grouping of the codes, although not comprehensively checked, proved to be in complete agreement. Once these mind-maps were finalised, I proceeded to write about the views on each major theme as they were presented by each voice.

The mind-maps were subsequently compared by overlapping them to examine how each voice saw the major themes in relation to each of the other voices. The discrepancies between the voices were noted and a series of questions were developed about the discrepancies. For example, advocates spoke intensively about forgiveness being offered by the perpetrators, but neither Moltmann nor Sölle did so. This raised for me the issue of what the concept of forgiveness can offer to a theology of hope and subsequently this became one of the sub-issues to be explored.

The material was then reorganised so that each chapter explored each of the questions that arose out of the comparison of the mind-maps and this provided the framework within which the thesis is being presented. Where this reorganisation then developed

³⁷ I use the term “voices” to speak collectively about the writing of Moltmann, Sölle and the reflections of the advocates as a group.

similar chapters in two different sections, the chapters were merged and put into the section that seemed more relevant.

Throughout the thesis, I have included extended quotes from and writing by the advocates. This aims to continue to remind the reader of the real-life, lived experiences, the times of joy and sadness as well as the utter despair experienced by advocates and the people they sought to support. I felt it necessary to draw in this lived experience without the analysis that accompanies much of the chapters; without it a picture of life in the detention centres would be lacking and this picture is necessary to understanding why I interviewed advocates as a way of reflecting on suffering and hope.

It must also be acknowledged that in writing about the major themes, I have given weight to the voices of those who visited the detention centres, rather than giving them equal weighting with those whose role was simply to support the refugees after their release. As previously noted, the reflections of these two groups were significantly different because the latter group did not experience their friends in the dark and despairing place of the detention centre. For this latter group, although the threat of deportation at the end of the temporary protection visa (TPV) still hung over the refugees and affected the refugees' ability to focus on starting their life over, advocates themselves saw the possibilities of the future and did not engage as much in the darker side of the refugees' experiences. Whilst the contributions of the latter group have been included, these have mostly been used to support what other advocates have said.

Reflections on the Study

As noted above, the research required changes before the interview process even started, because the group of participants changed. In hindsight, this should have resulted in further changes to the interview structure. For example, the interview was designed to be conducted over three sessions and hence there was repetition in the questions in order to either return people to a comfortable mental space at the end of a session or to return the interviewee to the point where the previous interview had finished. Since the questions were designed as a starting point, I quickly adapted the list in order to accommodate this change, but since this adaptation was not written down it could have varied from interview to interview.

A further point is that although the literature suggested that for the refugees and asylum seekers there were similar issues in detention to being in the community on a temporary protection visa (TPV), it turned out that the advocates who supported them had a significantly different response to the questions of suffering and hope. In short, those who supported refugees on TPVs had a much more hopeful view of the refugees' future than either the refugees themselves or those who visited the detention centres. Whilst this difference would make interesting further research, it also created a difficulty in balancing the need to honour the contribution by all advocates with the need to highlight the issue of suffering and hope in a dark time that was the focus of this thesis.

Finally, because of the time constraints of a research trip, I had to complete far more interviews in a shortened timeframe than was ideal. Although I was able to limit my work to a maximum of three interviews per day, each interview was the equivalent of half a day's work. In a future research project I would ensure more time to complete such a

research trip and deliberately schedule days off in order that I would have time and mental space to process the information gathered in the interviews.

After the Fires in Baxter

After the fires in the notorious Baxter detention prison the single men were cruelly treated by DIMIA and ACM**. Still no charges have been laid. There was some evidence that DIMIA or ACM may have been involved more than they have admitted. A Federal Police Officer investigating the fires cause commented that “there was more to it than meets the eye.”*

An extract follows from a letter one of the detainees wrote to his visitor friends, January 2003.

Hope you had a good party in new year. Unfortunately we hadn't good party in new year and our new year started with fire in Baxter.

... when I saw the fire and that stage was like hell so there were lots of smoke and we couldn't breathe properly...

... one detainee wants to bring his stuff outside and his room was full of fire... then I said advice who you shouldn't go there and he started to use of bad language to me and I didn't let him through the fire... in that night he did complain against of me...

... then ACM guards took me to isolation room and I worry about my stuff and my friends so I was in isolation room for nine days. Then the ACM guards teased (=taunted) me so much in there and if I stayed in there for a long time I become crazy because there is really horrible place...

Anyway now I'm in new compound... unfortunately we have no access to phone and we have no right to go outside of compound even to gym or somewhere else and the television doesn't work because ACM and DIMIA don't let us to use.

Happy New Year...

-AN

* See note 111 below

** The private company responsible for the detention centres.

A Sunburnt Country

Introduction

Australia has long-held itself to be a land of opportunities for migrants, a country where everyone can have a fresh start regardless of their previous background.¹ Yet in spite of this egalitarian idea, the reality has been that this potential opportunity has only been available to some of the many people who have come to live in Australia, and only recently to the first inhabitants of this land.² This chapter will illustrate the development of thought of Australians in relation to those who are perceived as foreigners. It is important because the psychological history of Australia has coloured the way that we view those who are considered as “other” in our country. The notion that we are “British” primarily has restricted those who are viewed as “acceptable.”³ As such, Howard, when Prime Minister, could vilify Middle Eastern Asylum seekers in order to gain electoral advantage.⁴ Since the 2001 election, informed Australians have been making known the plight of those in immigration detention.⁵ This in turn has influenced the treatment of asylum seekers and the supports that were available in the community for those who were released from detention.

In History's Page

Although Australia is primarily a land of immigrants, for much of its history various governments have been concerned to make the immigrants the “right” immigrants.⁶ In its early history, Australia saw themselves as a part of Britain and thus the vast majority

¹ Celeste Lipow MacLeod. *Multicultural Australia: Its history and future*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2006), p. 7

² Catriona Elder. *Being Australian: Narratives of national identity*. (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007)

³ Gary P. Freeman and James Jupp, "Comparing immigration policy in Australia and the United States," in *Nations of immigrants: Australia, the United States, and international migration*, ed. Gary P. Freeman and James Jupp (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 16

⁴ William Maley, "Refugees," in *The Howard years*, ed. Robert Manne (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2004), p. 145-148

⁵ As told to me by the participants in my research interviews.

⁶ Gwenda Tavan. *The long, slow death of white Australia*. (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005), p. 8

of immigrants were, and still are, British.⁷ By the time of Federation in 1901, immigration policy in Australia had been a recurring theme within the legislation across the colonies. Prior to Federation “legislation on the Chinese question ha[d] taken place in most states.”⁸ The legislation enacted by the Commonwealth Parliament was modelled on that of other jurisdictions, such as Natal, where immigration of non-European people could occur but was restricted.⁹

The Asian immigration that had occurred because of the gold rush contributed to the fear that Australia would be taken over by those who were not British.¹⁰ Hence the Commonwealth Government proceeded to create its own legislation to restrict immigration of people considered undesirable. The concern to restrict those seen as undesirable was not only by race, but also for the entry of persons “likely to become a charge upon the public or charitable institutions” including people with disabilities, criminals and prostitutes.¹¹ In order to achieve this, potential entrants were required to complete a dictation test in “any European language.”¹²

Whilst there was a question of discrimination against some potential groups of immigrants, entry was generally restricted to people of European descent, such as French Canadians.¹³ The use of any European language in the dictation test allowed for more than simply keeping out the relatively few undesirable British migrants. It also

⁷ James Jupp, "From 'White Australia' to 'Part of Asia': Recent shifts in Australian immigration policy towards the region.(Diversity and Comparability: International Migrants in Host Countries on Four Continents)", *International Migration Review* 29, no. 1 (1995), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A16991101&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=murdoch&version=1.0>

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 7th August 1901, 3497, Edward Barton

⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 7th August 1901, 3497-8, Edward Barton

¹⁰ Don McMaster. *Asylum seekers: Australia's response to refugees*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 3-4

¹¹ (Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 7th August 1901, 3498, Edward Barton)

¹² Tavan. *White Australia*, p. 22

¹³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 7th August 1901, 3500, Edward Barton

meant that populations, such as the Germans in South Australia could be granted entry whereas the Chinese gold-seekers and the Afghan cameleers could potentially be restricted or kept out altogether.¹⁴

In the years leading up to World War II, this European construction of the acceptability of immigrants was challenged by the situation of Jews seeking to escape Nazi persecution. In those years Australia consistently demonstrated a reluctance to allow Jewish refugees entry and cited an inability to assimilate as the reason.¹⁵ This attitude changed after World War II and alongside this resistance to the foreign “other,” was also a policy of deliberately aiming to increase the population.¹⁶ Three strategies were developed: the migration of children from Britain, assisted passage to those of British extraction, and the resettlement of European refugees who had been displaced in World War II. In spite of this third source, the intention was to restrict to 10 percent the immigrants of non-British descent,¹⁷ though in reality this did not occur.¹⁸ At the same time, Asian migration was permitted, but this was restricted to temporary residence and student visas.¹⁹ Thus for the first time, Australians encountered people who were not of European heritage. Although discrimination was encountered by these refugees, their much needed labour benefited the community as a whole and so acceptance was gradually gained.²⁰

After the World War II, the changing international situation also led to worldwide changes in immigration policy. This was reflected in Australia with the *Immigration (Restriction) Act 1901* (Cth) being superseded by the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth). In the

¹⁴ Tavan. *White Australia*, p. 10

¹⁵ Binoy Kampmark, " 'Spying for Hitler' and 'working for Bin Laden': Comparative Australian discourses on refugees", *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 1 (2006), p. 12

¹⁶ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 43

¹⁷ Calwell cited in Geoffrey Sherington. *Australia's immigrants, 1788-1978*, Australian experience. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 128

¹⁸ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 44

¹⁹ MacLeod. *Multiethnic Australia*, p. 116

²⁰ An example of this is demonstrated in Raimond Gaita. *Romulus, my father*. (Melbourne: Text Publishing Co., 2007)

parliamentary debate it was noted that the universal use of passports and visas rendered the dictation test unnecessary.²¹ Potential immigrants could be screened in their home country prior to departing for Australia. This led to a broadening on those who were considered acceptable and for the first time, Southern European migrants were accepted with assisted passages.²² As a result, the majority of applicants for Australian migration were from Mediterranean countries; however, legislators maintained that “the problem of finding the right type of Immigrant for Australia [was] becoming increasingly difficult.”²³ Potential migrants were thus still assessed in racist terms, but the skills of individuals were gradually being considered.²⁴ To facilitate this, the immigration laws were therefore reworked in order to facilitate immigration of desirable people and this was particularly coupled with offers of assisted passage.²⁵ The Migration Act (*Cth*) was subsequently passed by the Senate and returned to the House of Representatives without amendment,²⁶ suggesting a relatively uniform position on the issue. However, although migration at this time was opened to a larger group of people, it was still considered primarily in terms of people of European descent.²⁷

Ang suggests that the Vietnam War was integral to the dismantling of the White Australia policy and the subsequent acceptance of Asian migration;²⁸ however, even this acceptance was marginal at best with the references in the media being supportive of the view that these refugees were too different to fit into Australian society.²⁹ Acceptance

²¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 8th May 1958, 1642, Mr Clarey

²² James Jupp. *From White Australia to Woomera: The story of Australian immigration*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 18

²³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 8th May 1958, 1642, Mr Clarey

²⁴ Tavan. *White Australia*, p. 50

²⁵ Jupp. *From White Australia to Woomera*, p. 17

²⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 30th September 1958, 1806.

²⁷ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 43

²⁸ Ien Ang, "From White Australia to fortress Australia: The anxious nation in the new century," in *Legacies of white Australia: Race, culture and nation*, ed. David Walker, Janice Gothard, and Laksiri Jayasuriya (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), p. 62

²⁹ Elder. *Being Australian*, p. 124

of Asian immigration gradually increased over the subsequent years and concern about maintaining the European nature of Australian society was no longer a mainstream issue.³⁰ Given that these were refugees escaping from the Communist regime, it could be surmised that they were seen as being the enemies of a common enemy and thus were more acceptable in Australian culture. This and other aspects of refugee policy will be discussed in more detail below.

However, the acceptance of Asian immigration was certainly not uniform across the Australian community. Periodically organisations such as the “Australian Nationalist Movement” and the “One Nation Party” have arisen and politicians, such as John Howard during his time as the opposition leader, have argued against Asian immigration.³¹ Similarly there have been arguments against accepting immigrants from other racial groups such as the then Minister for Immigration Kevin Andrew’s suggestion to reduce African immigration because of concerns about their integrating into Australian society,³² is a case in point.

Alongside these policies defining who would be accepted to migrate to Australia, there were also policies reflecting how the immigrants were meant to fit in to the community. Initially the expectation was for migrants to assimilate, that is to blend into the Australian society without a recognisable difference.³³ Markus notes that failure to assimilate was blamed on the individuals rather than on the social structures in the community.³⁴ The subsequent policy was one of integration. This acknowledged that migrants would require assistance in adjusting to a new culture and that in their own

³⁰ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 49ff

³¹ Ibid.

³² “African refugee numbers reduced over integration concerns,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/10/02/2049280.htm>

³³ Elder. *Being Australian*, p. 130

³⁴ Andrew Markus. *Race: John Howard and the remaking of Australia*. (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2001), p. 16

homes they would be likely to continue their own traditions.³⁵ The current thrust of government policy is multiculturalism which has been described as a policy that acknowledged “not everyone should be the same; rather it was an approach that stressed ‘unity in diversity’.”³⁶ Under this policy, new migrants are assisted in resettling in Australia. English classes are offered for adults and children and support services such as migrant resource centres are developed.³⁷

Australian Refugee Policy

Australia’s legal responsibility to care for refugees commenced with the signing of the of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the Refugee Convention) on 22nd January 1954 and its responsibilities were expanded by ratifying the 1967 Protocol in 1973.³⁸ Before exploring the Australian response to refugees through the ages, I will briefly outline the relevant sections of the Refugee Convention.

Refugee Convention

The Second World War created a massive displacement of people throughout Europe with populations of refugees and displaced persons numbering in the millions.³⁹ Some were forcibly moved to other countries because of the Nazi labour camps;⁴⁰ others became stateless because of the reorganisation of national boundaries;⁴¹ and others who had fled the Nazi persecutions because of political factors were unable to return home.⁴²

³⁵ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 6

³⁶ Elder. *Being Australian*, p. 131

³⁷ Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, "Our services," <http://www.mmrcwa.org.au/services.php>

³⁸ UNHCR, "States parties to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol,"

<http://www.unhcr.org/3b73b0d63.html>

³⁹ Karatani Rieko, "How history separated refugee and migrant regimes: In search of their institutional origins", *International Journal of Refugee Law* 17, no. 3 (2005), p. 527

⁴⁰ Leslie Page Moch. *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650*. 2nd ed, Interdisciplinary studies in history. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 169

⁴¹ Dariusz Stola, "Forced migrations in Central European history", *International Migration Review* 26, no. 2 (1992), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2547061>

⁴² Ibid.

With the shortage of food and other resources that resulted from the war, the nations involved in the rebuilding of Europe agreed to assist the refugees who were at greatest risk.⁴³ The Refugee Convention was developed in this context. Its definition of refugees was originally limited to people in Europe displaced prior to 1951, but in 1967 an additional protocol was developed to remove these limitations.⁴⁴ Thus a Eurocentric bias emerged in the legal definition of refugees.⁴⁵

According to the Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who:

[O]wing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...⁴⁶

Currently several of these persecutions prevail in the Middle East. Countries such as Iran have made conversion to Christianity an offence punishable by death;⁴⁷ in other countries people are politically and economically discriminated against if they are not Muslim.⁴⁸ For instance, Religious minorities, such as the Baha'i and Mandeans often face persecution in Islamic countries.⁴⁹ Kurdish people are frequently discriminated against racially, because of their wish to have a separate homeland that spans the countries of Turkey and Iraq.⁵⁰ In Afghanistan, tribal groups, such as the Hazara are persecuted by the Pashtuns because of their different religious and racial orientation and

⁴³ UNHCR, "The 1951 Refugee Convention: Questions & answers," UNHCR Media Relations and Public Information Service, <http://www.unhcr.org/3c0f495f4.pdf>, p. 7

⁴⁴ United Nations, "Protocol relating to the status of refugees of 31 January 1967," http://www.unhcr.bg/bglaw/en/_02_protocol%2067en.pdf

⁴⁵ Jennifer Hyndman. *Managing displacement: Refugees and the politics of humanitarianism*. Edited by David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro. Vol. 16, Borderlines. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 8

⁴⁶ United Nations, "Convention relating to the status of refugees," Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm, article 1

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Middle East and North Africa: Overview," <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/print/full/mena.pdf>

⁴⁸ Mandaean Associations Union, "The Mandaean human rights in Iraq report - 2004," http://www.mandaeanunion.org/HMRG/EN_HMRG_001.htm

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Middle East & North Africa"

⁵⁰ William L. Cleveland. *A history of the modern Middle East*. 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004), p. 526

their resistance to the Taliban.⁵¹ In theory all these groups fall under the rubric of the Refugee Convention and are entitled to its protections. In practice there are factors that limit their capacity to call on it or use it to the full as will be discussed below.

It also needs to be recognised that there are groups who suffer considerable persecution but who are not yet protected by the Convention. For example, while women may face persecution because of their gender and homosexuals because of their homosexuality, they may fail to gain protection under the Convention because of the various interpretations of what constitutes a “particular social group.”⁵² In these cases, Australia makes use of “special humanitarian” visas for which the application needs to be made outside its territory.⁵³ Other Western nations, for example the United Kingdom and Denmark, have attempted to overcome these limitations by providing humanitarian visas for non-convention reasons.⁵⁴ During their travels asylum seekers lack the protections offered to formally recognised refugees.

Another factor limiting the efficacy of the Convention is the way in which political and economic considerations (as opposed to the needs of refugee populations) influence governments in deciding who to admit to their country.⁵⁵ For example, Australia gave preference to Southern European over Eastern European refugees following the Second World War because of the on-going “White Australia” policy.⁵⁶ More recently concern has been raised that this same bias can also be seen in the rejection of Middle Eastern

⁵¹ UNHCR, “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Afghanistan : Hazaras,” United Nations, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49749d693d.html>

⁵² Mirko Bagaric and Penny Dimopoulos, “Refugee law - time for a fundamental re-think: Need as the criterion for assistance”, *Canterbury Law Review* 9, (2003), p. 278

⁵³ Mary E. Crock, Ben Saul, and Azadeh Dastyari. *Future seekers II: Refugees and irregular migration in Australia*. (Annandale: Federation Press, 2006), p. 15

⁵⁴ Johan Cels, “Responses of European states to *de facto* refugees,” in *Refugees and international relations*, ed. Gilbert D. Loescher and Laila Monahan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 192ff

⁵⁵ Thomas George Weiss and Cindy Collins. *Humanitarian challenges and intervention: World politics and the dilemmas of help*, *Dilemmas in world politics*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p. 142

⁵⁶ Charles A. Price. *Refugees: The challenge of the future: Proceedings, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, fourth Academy Symposium, 3-4 November 1980*. (Canberra: Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, 1981), p. 76

refugees and the depiction of such asylum seekers as being potential “terrorists” by certain political and media interests.⁵⁷

In spite of these limitation the Convention does attempt to establish and safeguard the rights of refugees as receiving countries are required to treat refugees the same as any other alien resident in their territory.⁵⁸ These rights include the freedom of movement,⁵⁹ access to social security,⁶⁰ and housing.⁶¹ However, refugees in non-signatory countries frequently do not have these rights. For example, the Afghani refugees on the Western border of Pakistan live in camps on the edge of the desert.⁶² International aid groups provide a certain amount of food and education and the few refugees who find employment tend to be working for aid groups.⁶³ These refugees are restricted in their travel and few are able to access education past primary schooling.⁶⁴ This situation is not dissimilar to that of other refugee camps in the Middle East, which have been likened to the slum conditions in Victorian England with poor access to health, education and social support.⁶⁵

In order for a refugee to seek the protection of the Convention in relation to such rights they need to be in a country that is signatory to the Convention.⁶⁶ However many of the countries which Middle Eastern refugees can easily access from their homelands, such

⁵⁷ Laurie Nowell, "Enemies within Aussie terror links," *Sunday Tasmanian*, 30th September 2001.

⁵⁸ United Nations, "Refugee convention (1951)," article 7

⁵⁹ Ibid. article 31

⁶⁰ Ibid. article 24

⁶¹ Ibid. article 21

⁶² George Groenewold, "Millennium development indicators of education, employment and gender equality of Afghan refugees in Pakistan: Country report," Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, <http://www.unhcr.org/45adf4122.pdf>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ J. E. Zabaneh, G. C. M Watt, and C. A. O'Donnell, "Living and health conditions of Palestinian refugees in an unofficial camp in the Lebanon: A cross-sectional survey", *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 62,(2008), p. 91

⁶⁶ UNHCR, "Refugee Convention Q & A," p. 11

as Pakistan and Lebanon, are not signatories to the Refugee Convention.⁶⁷ Another factor is that within a country UNHCR offices may be under the control of rival ethnic groups leaving some refugees unable to gain the support offered by this agency. This leaves them with little or no option but to travel to countries that are signatory to the Refugee Convention and apply for refugee status there.⁶⁸

It must be noted that a distinction between an 'asylum seeker' and a 'refugee' can be made on the basis that an asylum seeker is one who has not yet had a formal assessment recognising him or her as a refugee. However, according to the Convention all who meet their definition of refugee fall under its rubric. In this sense the differences between asylum seekers, those who wish to apply for refugee status, and refugees are minimal and in the spirit of the Refugee Convention once a definition applies to an individual, they should be afforded the rights of a refugee. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) guidelines explicitly support this interpretation.⁶⁹

A further right is for a refugee to enter a country without valid documentation and the Refugee Convention specifically prohibits the imposition of any form of punishment providing "they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence."⁷⁰ Despite this, Australia - as well as the United States - has placed asylum seekers in detention centres pending the determination of their status.⁷¹ Brennan suggests that countries such as Australia also made it difficult

⁶⁷ United Nations, "United Nations treaty collection: Convention relating to the status of refugees," <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/treaty2ref.htm>

⁶⁸ Frank Brennan, *Tampering with asylum: A universal humanitarian problem*. Rev. ed. (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), p. 115

⁶⁹ United Nations. *UNHCR revised guidelines on applicable criteria and standards relating to the detention of asylum seekers*. (Geneva: UNHCR, 1999), p. 1

⁷⁰ United Nations, "Refugee convention (1951)," article 31

⁷¹ Azadeh Dastyari, "Refugees on Guantanamo Bay: A blue print for Australia's "Pacific Solution"?", *Australian Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2007), <http://0-find.galegroup.com/prospero.muurdoch.edu.au:80/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabId=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A16042033&source=gale&srcprod>

for people from refugee-originating countries, to obtain visas,⁷² thus restricting the legal avenues by which Middle Eastern refugees can enter. However whilst the Refugee Convention does delineate the responsibilities of countries once a refugee has been accepted as such, there is no obligation to allow an asylum seeker to enter a country.⁷³ As Mares points out, this leaves most asylum seekers with few options but to enter a country without a valid visa.⁷⁴

All refugees, whatever their technical status, have the right not to be “refouled” or returned to an unsafe situation; this right is critically important to the protection of refugees and central to the Refugee Convention.⁷⁵ In spite of this, several countries including Australia and the United States have had policies of forcing asylum seekers to return to their countries of origin prior to their being able to apply for refugee status.⁷⁶ Operation Relex in 2001 was one example of this. During this time any boat entering in Australian waters was forcibly returned to Indonesia where the passengers were forced to remain within refugee camps.⁷⁷ Many of those coming on the boats were Middle Eastern people seeking asylum.⁷⁸ Even though at the time they were not technically classified as refugees, nor were they within the borders of the country where they wished to claim asylum, this practice is against the spirit of the Refugee Convention. Whilst returnees who leave from immigration detention centres are not technically refouled, as they have not yet been granted refugee status, it is arguable that the

⁷² Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 90-91

⁷³ Peter Mares. *Borderline: Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers*. (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), p. 185

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ United Nations, "Refugee convention (1951)," article 33

⁷⁶ Dastyari, "Guantanamo Bay"

⁷⁷ Crock, Saul, and Dastyari. *Future seekers II*, p. 122-123

⁷⁸ Ibid.

conditions in these centres are such that pressure was placed on individuals to return to their country of origin.⁷⁹

Responding to the Convention

The on-going desire to populate Australia with the “right” types of people, as outlined above, continued to be reflected in Australian refugee policies. In the resettlement of refugees after the Second World War, preference was given to those who were desirable according to the White Australia policy of the day.⁸⁰ It was only with the subsequent arrival of Vietnamese boat people in 1976 that a significant number of non-Europeans entered Australia.⁸¹ The relative isolation of Australia may have helped in generating acceptance of the Refugee Convention, yet as Mares notes, “Australia has signed the 1951 Convention, but successive governments have been irritated by its obligations and reluctant to provide sanctuary to those who knock on our doors uninvited.”⁸² This irritation has been particularly noticeable in recent government policy, including that of mandatory detention and the Pacific Solution.

From 1976 until 1992, refugees who came to Australia as a country of first asylum were allowed to live in the community until their claims were established. Visas were granted on the recommendation of a committee to the Minister, which included a representative of the UNHCR.⁸³ However, in 1992 the Keating Government made legislative changes that meant asylum seekers would be detained without access to court review of the detention.⁸⁴ In the same year, procedures were formalised for the granting

⁷⁹ Linda Briskman, Christopher R. Goddard, and Susie Latham. *Human rights overboard: Seeking asylum in Australia*. (Carlton North: Scribe Publishing, 2008), p. 230

⁸⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, "Australia and refugees, 1901-2002: An annotated chronology based on official sources: Australia and refugees, 1901-1991," http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/online/Refugees_s1.htm

⁸¹ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 3

⁸² Mares. *Borderline*, p. 201

⁸³ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 36

⁸⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, "1901-1991"

of refugee protection for applicants within Australia.⁸⁵ Brennan suggests this change in policy was due to the arrival of asylum seekers from countries where the then foreign minister had negotiated a peace accord, thus the continued arrival of refugees from those countries were an embarrassment.⁸⁶

Detention centres were initially established in major regional centres primarily to hold those who faced deportation for visa violations.⁸⁷ With the arrival of the Cambodian asylum seekers in 1993 further detention centres were opened, but this time in remote locations.⁸⁸ At the time it was argued that this allowed processing of asylum seekers closer to their point of entry. However, the later building of detention centres in inland locations such as Woomera counters this argument.⁸⁹ Brennan argues this shift of setting was in order to restrict the access of lawyers and human rights activists to the asylum seekers.⁹⁰ Thereafter the city detention centres, such as in Perth and Melbourne, tended to be used for people who were not asylum seekers but had committed immigration offences such as over-staying their visas. Detention centres in remote areas, such as Curtin, Port Hedland and Baxter were used for asylum seekers.⁹¹ Villawood in Sydney was the only city detention centre to be used for asylum seekers.⁹²

The conditions in the detention centres have fluctuated over the years and have generally improved as the numbers of detainees reduce.⁹³ Theoretically, at least,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 43-44

⁸⁷ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "A last resort: The national enquiry into children in immigration detention" (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004), http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/children_detention_report/report/PDF/alr_complete.pdf, p. 141

⁸⁸ Crock, Saul, and Dastyari. *Future seekers II*, p. 36

⁸⁹ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 40

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Crock, Saul, and Dastyari. *Future seekers II*, p. 166

⁹² In Sarah Mares and Louise K. Newman. *Acting from the heart: Australian advocates for asylum seekers tell their stories*. (Sydney: Finch Pub., 2007), advocates relate their experiences of visiting asylum seekers who are detained in the Villawood centre.

⁹³ For example, in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "A report on visits to immigration detention facilities by the Human Rights Commissioner 2007," Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/idc/idc2007.html significant improvements were praised by HREOC, but the report also consistently noted the low numbers in detention. This was the same for the 2006 report.

children were to be permitted to attend school, medical care should be offered as needed and every detainee should be able to practice their own culture.⁹⁴ In practice, however, when the detention centres were full, this did not occur. Their conditions have been described as harsh, isolating and, in most cases, brutal.⁹⁵ Burnside QC⁹⁶ has argued that Australia's policy of mandatory detention not only contravenes the Refugee Convention, but also is a crime against humanity according to the government's own laws.⁹⁷ Thus for those escaping from a harsh regime and coming to Australia to seek refuge status, the detention centres have provided yet another form of harsh treatment. This argument is reinforced by the Howard Government's assertions that mandatory detention is a deterrent to asylum seekers.⁹⁸ Given the policy of detention without review, the conditions in the detention centres, as discussed above, meets the definition of torture according to the Convention.⁹⁹

The rights of asylum seekers have in reality been reduced over the past two decades under this policy of mandatory detention. One critical example has been governmental policy of not informing asylum seekers of their right to a government funded lawyer unless legal advice is requested.¹⁰⁰ Given the difficulties of language as well as an inability to pay for legal advice, this effectively restricted access to representation and

⁹⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Immigration detention guidelines": Commonwealth of Australia, 2000)

⁹⁵ For examples of the situation in immigration detention centres, see People's Inquiry into Detention, "We've boundless plains to share: The first report of the people's inquiry into detention": Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work, 2006)

⁹⁶ Queen's Council

⁹⁷ Julian Burnside. *Watching brief: Reflections on human rights, law, and justice*. (Carlton North: Scribe Publications, 2007), p. 28-29

⁹⁸ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p.46

⁹⁹ Torture, according to United Nations, "Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cat.html>, article 1, is defined as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person ... when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions."

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Report on the Human Rights Commissioner's visit to Curtin I R P C in July 2000," Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/asylum_seekers/curtin.html

thus reduced the number of successful refugee claims. By failing to inform asylum seekers of their right to legal advice, Australia is likely to refool refugees.

In addition to the immigration detention centres, in 1999 the Migration Act was altered so that those arriving in Australia by boat would only be able to access Temporary Protection Visas (TPV).¹⁰¹ This visa meant that refugees were given a three (or in some cases five) year visa, after which they needed to reapply and prove the on-going need for protection under the Refugee Convention.¹⁰² At that time, to apply for any other class of visa required the refugee to leave the country prior to applying.¹⁰³ This has since been altered so that under certain conditions other visas may be granted from within Australia.¹⁰⁴

In 2001 Australian refugee policy made international headlines with what became known as the Tampa affair. A group of asylum seekers were rescued by the captain of the Tampa who then proceeded to Christmas Island because of the medical condition of some of those rescued.¹⁰⁵ As a result of this, the Pacific Solution was negotiated, whereby off-shore islands between 23° south on the west coast and 21° south on the east coast were excised from Australia's migration zone. Asylum seekers who landed in the area were taken to third countries for assessment with subsequently no rights for those found to be refugees to be resettled in Australia.¹⁰⁶ The governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea both agreed to make land available for the detention centres, although such detention was against both their constitutions.¹⁰⁷ In return for hosting the

¹⁰¹ Janet Phillips, "Research note no. 51 2003-04: Temporary protection visas," Parliament of Australia: Parliamentary Library, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/RN/2003-04/04rn51.htm>

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Don McMaster, "Temporary protection visas: Obstructing refugee livelihoods", *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2006), p.137

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Crock, Saul, and Dastyari. *Future seekers II*, p. 114

¹⁰⁶ Commonwealth, 2002, Migration legislation amendment (further protection measures) Bill 2002 [No. 2], Bills Digest no. 149 2002-03

¹⁰⁷ Burnside. *Watching brief*, p. 83

detention centres, the Australian Government offered aid totalling \$26 million to Nauru and similar amounts to Papua New Guinea.¹⁰⁸

The off-shore processing centres effectively remove asylum seekers from community and legal supports. Advocates who tried to access Nauru were refused visas resulting in asylum seekers could only access legal support via the telephone.¹⁰⁹ Not only has this been noted to be ineffective with the difficulties of trauma and language barriers, but access to telephones were severely restricted due to the facilities at these detention centres.¹¹⁰ Thus asylum seekers in the off-shore processing centres were being held virtually incommunicado and certainly unable to access balanced legal support. Such treatment is contrary to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a signatory.¹¹¹ Because Australia is responsible for placing asylum seekers in these off-shore processing centres, it is also responsible for the conditions in the centres.

By 2004 the Department¹¹² was refusing permanent protection to Afghan refugees living in Australia on the basis that a change in government resulted in it being safe to return to Afghanistan in spite of the continuing violence.¹¹³ In 2001 the restrictions on applying for a Permanent Protection Visa (PPV) were increased. Refugees who have lived for more than seven days in a country where they could have applied for protection are ineligible for a PPV.¹¹⁴ Many of the countries assumed by the Australian

¹⁰⁸ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 128-129

¹⁰⁹ Evidence to Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee, Parliament of Australia, Sydney, Tuesday, 6th June

¹¹⁰ People's Inquiry into Detention, "Boundless plains"

¹¹¹ See articles 9 & 10; also United Nations, "Signatures to the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cprsigns.html>

¹¹² The government department responsible for refugees has had several name changes in the course of the period discussed in this chapter. To simplify the terminology, "the Department" will refer to DIMIA, DIMA, DIAC and all other permutations of its name. All other government departments will be named in full.

¹¹³ Andrew Cameron and Tracy Gordon, "Temporary protection visas – part 2: Social issues briefing #17, 8/7/2004.," Social Issues Executive, Diocese of Sydney, http://www.sie.sydney.anglican.asn.au/.../Social_Issues_briefing_017_-_Temporary_Protection_Visas__part_2.pdf

¹¹⁴ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 57

Government to be countries in which refugees could have applied for protection have intrinsic difficulties. For example, in Pakistan, which is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, the United Nations compound is guarded by Pashtun Afghanis. As the majority of asylum seekers are from the Hazera tribe,¹¹⁵ the tribal conflict continues in the so-called “safe” third country preventing people from using the United Nations to apply for refugee status.

Between the 2001 and 2004 elections the Australian people developed some awareness of the conditions in detention centres. Television programmes, such as “Four Corners,” were able to smuggle in cameras to reveal to the public the effects that detention has on refugees, including children.¹¹⁶ Thus popular opinion turned against the continued detention of asylum seekers.¹¹⁷ Alternatives to detention for children had always been theoretically available, but in practice were not used as a result of the argument that it was best for the children to stay with their parents.¹¹⁸ As a result of community pressure, in 2004 alternative detention became available in practice, initially for unaccompanied children and by the time of the Federal election for all family groups.¹¹⁹ Unaccompanied children were placed in foster care and families were able to live in community housing projects.¹²⁰ By 2005, the government claimed that all children had been released from detention,¹²¹ yet this was not truly the case as children were still able to be detained on Nauru and Manus Island,¹²² and although residential housing projects generally had better conditions, lack of freedom was still a concern to human rights

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 62

¹¹⁶ Margot O'Neill. *Blind Conscience*. (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2008), p. 74

¹¹⁷ Mares and Newman. *Acting from the heart: Australian advocates for asylum seekers tell their stories* records stories of the advocates for asylum seekers and many advocates cite seeing television programmes, such as the Four Corners episode, as being the impetus for their subsequent actions.

¹¹⁸ E.g. Ruddock, the then Immigration Minister, cited in Briskman, Goddard, and Latham. *Human rights overboard* p. 187

¹¹⁹ Crock, Saul, and Dastyari. *Future seekers II*, p. 164-165

¹²⁰ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, “A last resort: The national enquiry into children in immigration detention”), p. 697

¹²¹ Andra Jackson, “Last of children in detention set free,” *The Age*, 30th July 2005.

¹²² “Laws don't breach children in detention agreement: Vanstone,” *Australian Associated Press*, 3rd May 2006.

workers.¹²³ However a critical shift had been made as detainees no longer needed to be handcuffed or otherwise restrained before they could leave detention.¹²⁴

A further change in attitudes towards refugees can be illustrated by the community opposition to the Howard Government's attempts to extend the Pacific Solution. In 2006 as a response to the arrival of refugees from West Papua, the Government attempted to prevent any asylum seeker arriving by boat from claiming refugee status in Australia.¹²⁵ The Senate inquiry into the resultant bill had an unusually large number of responses: of the 136 submissions to the Committee only the Department's submission supported the proposed bill.¹²⁶ At the same time, thousands of Australians signed petitions calling on the Senate to reject the bill,¹²⁷ which it ultimately did. Community pressure prevented the passing of the bill and this represented a critical turning point in Australia's policy towards asylum seekers.

The reality that asylum seekers arriving by boat faced greater risks in their homelands is attested to by the fact that more claims are more successful than those of applicants who arrive by other means.¹²⁸ According to Crock, Saul & Dastyari this "reflect[s] the obvious point that individuals who can travel freely are less likely to meet the persecution requirements of the Refugee Convention."¹²⁹ Yet at the same time, these authors note that asylum seekers are less successful in their refugee claims than

¹²³ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, "Report of the inspections of Baxter Immigration Detention Facility and Port Augusta Residential Housing Project, April 2005," The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/baxterreport.pdf>, p. 13

¹²⁴ HREOC reports, such as Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Report of an inquiry into a complaint of acts or practices inconsistent with or contrary to human rights in an immigration detention centre," http://www.hreoc.gov.au/legal/HREOCA_reports/hrc?report?12?april.html, cites examples of detainees being refused outside medical attention unless they are handcuffed whilst outside of the detention centre.

¹²⁵ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 280

¹²⁶ Evidence to Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee, Parliament of Australia, Sydney, Tuesday, 6th June 2006, C&L37 (Ms Angela Chan)

¹²⁷ In the petition presented to the Senate by A Just Australia there were over 30,000 signatures. Evidence to Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee, Parliament of Australia, Sydney, Tuesday, 6th June 2006, C&L11 (Ms Kate Gauthier)

¹²⁸ Brennan. *Tampering with asylum*, p. 53

¹²⁹ Crock, Saul, and Dastyari. *Future seekers II*, p. 63

applicants in other countries which indicates that Australia “interprets the refugee definition more narrowly than other countries.”¹³⁰ This may reflect Australia’s ongoing demonstration of fear towards people who are perceived as different to the norm.

McMaster notes that:

Immigration, and more specifically refugee, policies are indicators of the attitude of a country to strangers, and the management of strangers reflects the sense of insecurity of a country in relation to others. Australia’s response to strangers, and especially to its ‘significant other’, has been highly discriminatory, revealing both a fear of the ‘other’ and a fragile Australian identity.¹³¹

This fear of the other is most able to be expressed when the other is also perceived as weaker or more vulnerable. Thus any government that wants to prey on the population’s fear of otherness can use refugees as an effective scapegoat for political advantage.

Border Control and Human Rights

Refugees often have few options but to enter a country with the assistance of people smugglers thereby circumventing the more typical visa system. The converse perspective was raised by the then Prime Minister, John Howard, who during a radio interview prior to the 2001 election said, “We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.”¹³² It is acknowledged by HREOC and refugee advocates that governments need to create a balance between national security and their obligations under international conventions.¹³³ This is acknowledged by the UNHCR who state that detention is permitted in order to verify the identity, investigate

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 22

¹³¹ McMaster. *Asylum seekers*, p. 4

¹³² Matthew Brown, “PM - Latham urges PM to remove public service gag,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2004/s1178727.htm>

¹³³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, “A report on visits to immigration detention facilities by the Human Rights Commissioner 2001,” Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/idc/idc2001.html

the claim, or for national security.¹³⁴ However the UNHCR only permits detention of refugees where the detention conforms to international law and argues that alternatives to detention should be the first option.¹³⁵

The need for border protection is acknowledged among those who seek for change in Australia's system of mandatory detention of asylum seekers:¹³⁶ it is the inhumane conditions to which asylum seekers are subjected, including potentially indefinite detention, which causes concern. As will be highlighted in the next chapter such conditions prove to have a serious detrimental effect on the detainees' mental health.

Softening the Hard Line

The treatment of refugees and asylum seekers has been of concern to the HREOC since the start of the mandatory detention regime. Concern has been raised by HREOC not only because of the conditions within the detention centres, but because of mandatory detention itself.¹³⁷ Indeed, in the 1998 inquiry into the detention of unauthorised arrivals it was noted that mandatory detention of asylum seekers was a breach of the international human rights standards which had been incorporated into Australian law.¹³⁸ In spite of this consistent call for a more humane approach, it was only in 2005 that the Howard Government started to adopt policies that allowed for the release of some asylum seekers into the community.¹³⁹ However because the detention centres built for the Pacific solution were outside Australia's jurisdiction, relatively few asylum seekers benefited.

¹³⁴ Kate Jastram and Marilyn Achiron. *Refugee protection: A guide to international refugee law*. (Geneva: UNHCR, 2001), p. 82

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 81-82

¹³⁶ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "2001 Immigration detention facilities report," p. 2

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Those who've come across the sea: Detention of unauthorised arrivals" (Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia, 1998), p. iv

¹³⁹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Immigration detention and human rights," Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/detention_rights.html

In 2007 the Rudd Labor Government was elected to power. At first there was celebration amongst the community of refugee advocates as it appeared that the government was taking a more humane approach. Indeed, during my research interviews in February 2009, advocates expressed their amazement that children who had arrived in the Christmas Island detention centre a few weeks later were playing on the beaches in Adelaide. However, with the persecution of the Tamils after the ending of the civil war in Sri Lanka and with on-going problems in Afghanistan, boats were once again arriving. At the time of writing there are over 1500 people in the Christmas Island detention centre;¹⁴⁰ and processing times have once again slowed down, with conditions reportedly deteriorating.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

Australia is a country of migrants and has a long history of welcoming the “right” sorts of migrants. Unfortunately alongside that those who have been considered different have experienced various forms of discrimination as well. This is a country with a very mixed history, one that claims to welcome the stranger, but would appear only some strangers. There is still much room for improvement towards the treatment of migrants and particularly refugees. The effects of the previous government’s policy of immigration detention has been on-going for those caught up in the system and the next chapter will explore the trauma that was inflicted on asylum seekers and refugees in their quest for freedom in Australia.

¹⁴⁰ Department of immigration and citizenship, "Immigration detention statistics summary: Community and detention services division, DIAC - As at 2 April 2010," http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/_pdf/immigration-detention-statistics-20100402.pdf

¹⁴¹ Uniting Church in Australia, "Church leaders voice concerns for wellbeing of asylum seekers on Christmas Island," http://unitingjustice.org.au/images/pdfs/issues/refugees/media-releases/100302_mr_christmasisland.pdf

At the moment I've got a fellow from Bangladesh who apparently was very badly mistreated by the system in Villawood. They had suffered the system there, but I don't know that first hand. In Villawood he used to get bad headaches and it was very hard to get a panadol there. The official line would be that they had excellent medical services, but reality is that they might have to wait 6 weeks to see the doctor and even if you see the doctor and you're prescribed tablets 4 times a day or whatever and even if you're dying on your bed you have to go to the medical centre and waiting in a queue to get them. He's been out for about 3 years. And what happened in the end was he had to have surgery. He had an infection in his ear and a tumour somewhere. And now he has constant very, very bad headaches and is deaf in one ear. Now his case, he's on a bridging visa. His case is before the minister at this stage.

- Frances

Trauma & Survival

Introduction

Migration from one country to another has stressors inherent to the process. Often a new culture, and sometimes a new language and system need to be engaged with. For those who come as refugees, this trauma is compounded by the events that forced them to leave their homes. In the past two decades, this has been further exacerbated by the stress of immigration detention and the temporary protection visa. This chapter will explore how these various issues affect the mental health of refugees and its flow-on effects to the ability to resettle in Australia. The effects that both the refugee process in general and the immigration detention regime in particular had on refugees clearly illustrates why the reflections of advocates may deepen a contemporary theological understanding of suffering and hope.

Refugees, by virtue of their need to have sought asylum, are a group that are highly likely to have experienced trauma prior to their arrival in a new country.¹ Those travelling to Australia by boat face even more stress because of the need to enter Australia using people smugglers and the subsequent incarceration in the Immigration Detention Centres. However, not all refugees will be traumatised as experiences of trauma are interpreted differently by each individual and typically contain two key elements: first the fear of death or serious injury and secondly the sense of victimisation.² Because this definition contains a subjective element, a person's interpretation is what ultimately defines whether or not an event is traumatic. Thus previous life experiences will affect this interpretation, including

¹ Boris Drozdek et al., "Chronic PTSD and medical services utilization by asylum seekers", *Journal of Refugee Studies* 16, no. 2 (2003), p. 204

² Dena Rosenbloom, Mary Beth Williams, and Barbara E. Watkins. *Life after trauma: A workbook for healing*. (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), p. 19

family, faith and cultural background. Therefore, for refugees from the Middle East, aspects such as their religious beliefs and family support will affect the amount of trauma experienced whilst applying for refugee status in Australia.

Effects of Torture

Many of the refugees arriving in Australia have experienced torture prior to leaving their homeland. Whilst it was once common to use torture to extract confessions from alleged criminals, the primary purpose of it is now universally acknowledged to be about the control of the community and to prevent dissent.³ As such it aims to destroy the person both physically and mentally: the resultant scars can affect the person for the rest of his/her life.⁴ Because of these scars, many refugees are dealing with post-traumatic stress symptoms at a time when they also have to cope with the impact of migration. Thus torture can significantly impact on a person's ability to settle into a new country and culture. Additionally, whilst evidence points to the majority of torture victims being men, women and children also are often victims, sometimes as a form of punishment for another family member.⁵ Thus it may be assumed that any refugee may be a victim of torture.

The physical effects of torture vary according to the actual methods used. It is not uncommon for the survivor to have joint pain from stretched muscles and ligaments, fractures, neurological damage and injuries to the vital organs.⁶ Alongside the physical effects of torture are the psychological consequences. Torture has been described as "the

³ Lone Jacobsen and Peter Vesti. *Torture survivors: A new group of patients*. 2nd rev. ed. (Copenhagen: International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, 1992), p. 14

⁴ Barbara Chester and Neal Holtan, "Working with refugee survivors of torture," *The Western Journal of Medicine* 157, no. 3 (1992), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A12611748&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=murdoch&version=1.0>

⁵ Peter Vesti and Marianne Kastrup, "Refugee status, torture, and adjustment," in *Traumatic stress: From theory to practice*, ed. John R. Freedy and Stevan E. Hobfoll (New York: Plenum Press, 1995), p. 218

⁶ Chester and Holtan, "Refugee survivors"

most extreme form of victimisation that human beings can experience.”⁷ Because of this, trust in humanity is likely to be destroyed and the capacity for relationships damaged.⁸

Torture survivors generally need to deal with issues such as guilt and powerlessness. Jacobsen and Vesti suggest that one common event to occur when individuals are being tortured is for the torturers to demand the names of associates with the threat that the victim’s own family will be tortured if there is a failure to comply.⁹ This has been described as an “impossible choice” and creates feelings of guilt, particularly if the individual had to witness this further torture. Through this “choice” being imposed on torture victims, individuals and their families are alienated from the community. This alienation is exacerbated due to the fear and stigmatisation that occurs because of the arrest.¹⁰

The use of arbitrary imprisonment and torture has effects beyond the individual who experiences it. In addition to aiming to break an individual, torture also aims to control a community through fear.¹¹ Often it is the community leaders who are singled out by the regime for torture.¹² Communities become compliant as a method of reducing the likelihood of members being tortured; it also assists in the development of systems of informers and so trust within a community breaks down.¹³ In cultures where the community is held to be important, the ostracising of torture survivors may result in

⁷ Edith Montgomery, "Tortured families: A coordinated management of meaning analysis," *Family Process* 43, no. 3 (2004), p. 349

⁸ David W. Engstrom and Amy Okamura, "Working with survivors of torture: Approaches to healing," *Families in Society* 85, no. 3 (2004), p. 306

⁹ Jacobsen and Vesti. *Torture survivors*, p. 32

¹⁰ Athar Yawar, "Healing in survivors of torture," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 97, no. 8 (2004), p. 368

¹¹ Rosemary A. Barbera, "Internal exile: Effects on families and communities," *Refuge* 25, no. 1 (2008), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A180553145&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=murdoch&version=1.0>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

alienation from the community. It is noted that even when the regime is known to unjustly arrest and torture its opponents, the presence of family members in prison can create stigma in the community. This was highlighted by Montgomery who interviewed one such family where the children were persecuted by other children because their father was imprisoned by the former Iraqi regime.¹⁴ Thus a second generation affected by torture emerges.

The effects of torture on families expand beyond the community stigmatisation and the need to seek asylum. When one spouse is arrested, the other becomes the main income earner, leaving the children with less social support from their families.¹⁵ Therefore, not only does the family experience increased poverty, but the children are less likely to have the support they need to overcome the trauma they experience. Children may lose their self-confidence and become withdrawn.¹⁶ Parents express anxiety about telling their children about the torture and yet may discuss it in the presence of their children.¹⁷ Because of this inability to discuss the facts surrounding the arrest and torture, people, and particularly children, may become more anxious and develop difficulties in trusting people.¹⁸

It is not uncommon for people who have survived torture subsequently to experience post-traumatic stress.¹⁹ Post-traumatic stress symptoms can include difficulty sleeping, outbursts of anger and over reacting to seemingly harmless events.²⁰ However, this may be hidden, for "Many torture survivors function quite well until they re-experience a stressful

¹⁴ Montgomery, "Tortured families," p. 361ff

¹⁵ Barbera, "Internal exile"

¹⁶ Jacobsen and Vesti. *Torture survivors*, p. 39

¹⁷ Montgomery, "Tortured families," p. 367

¹⁸ Barbera, "Internal exile"

¹⁹ Chester and Holtan, "Refugee survivors"

²⁰ Harold I. Kaplan, Benjamin J. Sadock, and Jack A. Grebb. *Kaplan and Sadock's synopsis of psychiatry: Behavioral sciences, clinical psychiatry*. 7th ed. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1994), p 608

situation”²¹ Thus post-traumatic stress may not be diagnosed until an individual has responded disproportionately to the immediately preceding stressor. The environment of the immigration detention centres was one factor noted as inducing this stress: indeed, the detention centre, with its guards in riot gear, reminded one refugee of the situation in Iraq from which she had escaped.²²

Factors that assist in recovery after torture include contact with other people and an environment where systems are predictable.²³ However, in the immigration detention centres these factors are typically missing. For example, several of the HREOC reports describe the use of isolation as punishment²⁴ Given the stressors of immigration that are outlined above, it is easy to see how the combined effect of surviving torture and immigration could place severe strain on an individual’s and his/her family’s mental health.

Immigration detention

The effect of immigration detention has significantly affected many of the detainees’ mental health. In spite of previous experiences which caused these refugees to flee their country and come to Australia, most did not have mental illness on their arrival in the detention centres.²⁵ However, because of the conditions within immigration detention, by the time they were granted visas, over 85% of people in immigration detention did have a mental illness.²⁶ Conditions within the detention centres exacerbated mental ill health and

²¹ Engstrom and Okamura, "Survivors of torture," p. 303

²² Fethi Mansouri and Stephanie Cauchi, "The psychological impact of extended temporary protection", *Refuge* 23, no. 2 (2006), <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A148367819&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=murdoch&version=1.0>

²³ Vesti and Kastrup, "Torture & adjustment," p. 223

²⁴ For example, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "2001 Immigration detention facilities report"

²⁵ People's Inquiry into Detention, "Boundless plains," p. 40

²⁶ Louise K. Newman, Michael Dudley, and Zachary Steel, "Asylum, detention, and mental health in Australia," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2008), p. 120ff cites a multiple studies demonstrating the prevalence of particular mental illnesses such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder being as high as

were also noted as detrimental to remediation of mental illness.²⁷ Some of the issues related to these conditions are discussed below.

Occupational Injustice

Occupations are meaningful activities which are carried out as part of daily life; they are particularly important as they contribute to the construction of the individual's identity.²⁸ The ways in which a person undertakes an occupation and the specific meanings encountered in it are influenced by the person's cultural background.²⁹ Because of this, occupational injustice can have a serious influence on a person's mental health. Occupational injustice includes several areas where individuals are unable to engage in meaningful activities. It includes "occupational alienation", where the life choices of an individual are dictated by his/her environment,³⁰ "occupational apartheid", wherein a particular group are systematically prevented from engaging in particular occupations,³¹ and "occupational deprivation" involving the inability to engage in occupations because of covert "forces external to the individual which diminish opportunities for occupational participation".³² Conditions of the detention centres described in the HREOC reports can be construed as occupational injustice.

85%. The total proportion of refugees with mental illness from the immigration detention is likely to be greater than this as at least some refugees will only have the symptoms of one illness.

²⁷ Terry Hutchinson and Fiona Martin, "Australia's human rights obligations relating to the mental health of refugee children in detention," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 27,(2004), p. 259

²⁸ Elizabeth Larson, Wendy Wood, and Florence Clark, "Occupational science: Building the science and practice of occupation through an academic discipline," in *Willard & Spackman's Occupational Therapy*, ed. Elizabeth Crepeau, Ellen S. Cohn, and Barbara A Boyt Schelle (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2003), p. 16

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Elizabeth A. Townsend and Helene J. Polatajko. *Enabling occupation II: Advancing an Occupational Therapy vision for health, well-being, & justice through occupation*. (Ottawa: CAOT Publications ACE, 2007), p. 77

³¹ Ibid., p. 78

³² Gail Elizabeth Whiteford, "Understanding the occupational deprivation of refugees: A case study from Kosovo," *The Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 72, no. 2 (2005), p. 79

Consistently HREOC reports from 1998 to 2007 showed evidence of a lack of recreational activity. As late as 2006 “HREOC saw no evidence of any effort to provide the children detained at the Northern [immigration detention] centre with appropriate education or recreation activities.”³³ This was similar to the situation for adults: although in theory there were educational, recreational and work programmes available, in practice they were cancelled or rarely available due to lack of staffing and other resources.³⁴ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the level of occupational injustice was higher in the off-shore processing centres, such as on Nauru.³⁵ However as these were not located in Australia, there is little information available on the conditions in these centres.

Trauma affects the ability to engage in occupations³⁶ and thus the deprivation that was created by the detention centre environment is worsened by the internal state of the individuals. The effects of the occupational injustice in the detention centres also relate to the recovery from torture. Prisons in which torture occurs typically lack structures such as routines that enable a certain predictability in life.³⁷ The development of occupations assists in not only re-establishing these routines, but also in developing a sense of control over one’s own life. By not having access to occupations the effects of torture are compounded and prolonged.

³³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Summary of observations following the inspection of mainland immigration detention facilities 2006," Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/asylum_seekers/inspection_of_mainland

³⁴ For example, this is illustrated in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Immigration detention: Human Rights Commissioner's 1998-99 Review" (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999), p. 21-25

³⁵ Such as in Mares and Newman. *Acting from the heart: Australian advocates for asylum seekers tell their stories*

³⁶ Whiteford, "Occupational Deprivation," p. 83

³⁷ Vesti and Kastrup, "Torture & adjustment," p. 220

Access to mental health services

Health services within the detention centres were rudimentary. Typically staff included a nurse and psychologist; however the medical supplies given to the nurses were limited. Asylum seekers noted that whatever their complaint, the response of the nurse would be to give panadol.³⁸ Whilst it is acknowledged that there are professional limitations on what a nurse can administer in such situations, such examples demonstrate that the medical care available to the detainees within detention centres was inadequate.³⁹ Indeed, staff had to act outside of their professional limitations and evidence exists to the employment in the detention centres of health professionals previously deregistered for malpractice.⁴⁰

Access to doctors and specialists was available, at least in theory. In the remote areas in which the detention centres were situated, the towns had limited medical services, thus an appointment for medical care could involve a long wait. One case in particular needs discussion. Although, as noted in the previous chapter, asylum seekers were theoretically able to access medical services that were needed, including mental health services, this happened at best in a minimal way. One asylum seeker, after repeated suicide attempts, was considered by the psychologist as being “very ill”.⁴¹ In spite of this, when mental health services were requested by the asylum seeker’s lawyer, the department opposed it in court.⁴²

Survivors of torture have particular needs and as a result the detention centre guidelines by HREOC specifically state that “survivors of torture and trauma shall have access without delay to assessment and treatment by a qualified professional with expertise in the

³⁸ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "HRC 1998-99 review," p. 17

³⁹ Bebe Loff, "Detention of asylum seekers in Australia", *The Lancet* 359,(2002), p. 792

⁴⁰ Briskman, Goddard, and Latham. *Human rights overboard*, p. 140-141

⁴¹ Mares and Newman. *Acting from the heart: Australian advocates for asylum seekers tell their stories*, p. 125

⁴² Ibid.

assessment and treatment of torture and trauma.”⁴³ In a subsequent report HREOC outlined the difficulties that asylum seekers had in accessing those services. These difficulties included staff refusing to take detainees to these services; the services refusing to operate in the centres because they were not conducive to recovery, staff refusing to allow visits from the services, and the physical distance from remote centres to such services.⁴⁴

By 2006, HREOC acknowledged a general improvement in the provision of mental health care to those in immigration detention. However, it also noted:

Similarly, it is still not possible to properly treat the mental health problems suffered by most immigration detainees. This is because the main way to treat a mental health concern is to remove the primary cause of the problem. In the case of immigration detainees, detention and uncertainty are amongst the main causes and they cannot usually be addressed by the mental health professionals.⁴⁵

Thus any mental health care that asylum seekers receive was, by definition, going to be inadequate to meet their needs in the light of restrictions on the intervention placed on the health professionals by virtue of the environment in which asylum seekers are detained. In addition, it has been noted that the “management” process for misbehaviour –including symptoms of mental illness – falls far below the standards that would be applied in psychiatric facilities,⁴⁶ thus often compounding the issue.

Temporary Protection

Granting of temporary rather than permanent protection for refugees was one of the changes to the Department’s processing of refugees in 1999.⁴⁷ This would allow those who had been granted refugee status a three year visa to live in the community but without the supports such as English language lessons and a right to return to Australia that are granted

⁴³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Immigration detention guidelines," p. 14

⁴⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "HRC 1998-99 review," p. 17

⁴⁵ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Summary of observations 2006"

⁴⁶ People's Inquiry into Detention, "Boundless plains," p. 41

⁴⁷ Mansouri and Cauchi, "Temporary protection"

to permanent residents.⁴⁸ At the end of this three year period, refugees are able to apply for a permanent protection visa, which requires proof that they would still be subject to persecution in their country of citizenship.⁴⁹

The temporary nature of the visa had profound effects on the ability of refugees to settle emotionally in Australia. Because of the uncertainty surrounding a TPV, refugees tended to have difficulty planning for their future or setting long-term goals.⁵⁰ Significantly higher rates of mental illness and associated symptoms were found in TPV compared to PPV holders. This included depression, anxiety, flashbacks, sleep disturbances and lack of concentration.⁵¹ Furthermore, it has been found that TPV holders are more likely to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress compared to PPV holders because of the threat of return to their country of origin.⁵² The symptoms of these mental illnesses generally will impact on the ability to engage in a new culture. For example, learning a new language is more difficult because of the lack of concentration.⁵³ Add to this that TPV holders are ineligible for language classes and there is a resultant increase in the difficulty in accessing suitable work and accommodation which in turn exacerbates the anxiety and depression.⁵⁴

TPV holders are more likely to have lower incomes than PPV holders.⁵⁵ Those who are professionals in their previous countries are unable to find work as such; typically they

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lone Knudsen, "Temporary protection in Australia: Qualitative and quantitative evidence of its effects on refugee mental health and adjustment" (Honours, Murdoch University, 2005), p. 20

⁵² Nicholas Procter, "Support for temporary protection visa holders: Partnering individual mental health support and migration law consultation", *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 11, no. 1 (2004)

⁵³ Mansouri and Cauchi, "Temporary protection"

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Knudsen, "Temporary protection," p. 37

work in unskilled and labouring positions.⁵⁶ Employers use the temporary nature of the visa as an excuse to keep TPV holders on a casual basis even when they have offered them a permanent position.⁵⁷ Because TPV holders are not working at the same level of challenge this job dissatisfaction increases the stress experienced in the work place and places them at a higher risk of work-place injuries and associated stress.

Some refugees were unable to bring all their children to Australia when they came seeking asylum.⁵⁸ Those who were granted TPVs are unable to apply for visas to allow them to bring even their dependents to Australia.⁵⁹ This has resulted in prolonged separation from other family members and feelings of guilt about those left behind.⁶⁰ Thus the psychological issues that occurred throughout the refugee process were compounded by an inability to care for family members.

The Church's Practical Response

With a long history underpinned by biblical understandings, many of the contemporary Australian churches have been active in working with refugees and asylum seekers. It is acknowledged that not all churches have assisted refugees in Australia and that some have even agreed with the policy of mandatory detention. However, those that have responded to assist refugees have worked cooperatively with each other and with other community groups. Therefore, rather than outlining what each church did, for the most part, this part of the chapter will explore more generally the response of the "churches." In examining the responses of the churches, the focus will be on the activities of the Western Australian churches. Not only do the majority of participants in this research live in Perth and the

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 36

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 36-37

⁵⁸ Mansouri and Cauchi, "Temporary protection"

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

surrounding areas, but Western Australia was the first location where mandatory detention took place and Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders were resettled,⁶¹ thus the churches in Perth were the first to develop strategies to meet their particular needs. There has been little documentation of the responses of the churches so this section in particular relies on personal communication from those involved.

Churches in Australia have been working with refugees since the White Russians fled from China in the late 1940s, hence when refugees on TPVs were released into the community with virtually no support from the government, the churches responded to the need.⁶² However, it must be noted the churches were able to respond *because* they did not receive government funding for their work whilst other organisations which did were unable to assist TPV holders because of the conditions of their grants.⁶³ The actual assistance varied between church organisations, but many of the current agencies that assist refugees in Western Australia, such as the Coalition for Asylum seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD) and Centre for Advocacy, Support and Education for Refugees (CASE for Refugees), came into being in the past decade as a consequence of various churches striving to meet the needs of TPV holders in practical and personal ways.

In 1993 and 1994 the Council of Churches Western Australia (CCWA) had been involved in a pilot project whereby long-term detainees were released into the community to be supported by the churches.⁶⁴ Part of the agreement behind the release of those in detention was that they would receive no further support from the Department;⁶⁵ which was a

⁶¹ Eira Clapton, 22nd July 2008.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Asylum, border control and detention*, (1994), 4.129 – 4.133

⁶⁵ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Asylum, border control and detention*, (1994), 4.132

significant factor in the churches having to withdraw their support of this programme.⁶⁶ Many of those involved saw the lack of support as a “vindictive move by the government,”⁶⁷ particularly given the short notice given prior to the release of asylum seekers.⁶⁸

In January 2000 a group of 34 Afghanis were released from immigration detention to live in Perth.⁶⁹ At the time they were given some money and taken to the Noalimba Conference Centre for their accommodation.⁷⁰ The funds supplied to the refugees were only sufficient for a few days’ accommodation.⁷¹ Fortunately in response to an article in *The West Australian* (newspaper), several members of local congregations volunteered to gather clothing and to teach English since TPV holders had no rights to the English classes available to other refugees.⁷² Those who went as volunteers quickly realised that learning English was only one issue facing these refugees and contacted the Council of Churches Western Australia to provide support. As more and more refugees were released it was realised that combined coordination was more effective than a piecemeal response from different churches. It was from this that the work of CARAD began in providing support and advocacy for refugees. In the first eighteen months of its existence, CARAD’s volunteers assisted an average of 100 refugees per month,⁷³ which proved a stressful workload with many volunteers experiencing burnout from the stress.⁷⁴ This was

⁶⁶ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

⁶⁷ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Asylum, border control and detention*, (1994), 4.133

⁶⁸ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Asylum, border control and detention*, (1994), 4.133

⁶⁹ Peta Rasdien and Mark Mallabone, “Illegal refugees to get \$326 handout,” *The West Australian*, 7th January 2000.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid; Eira Clapton, “Annual Report”: Coalition Assisting Refugees After Detention, (2001)

⁷⁴ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

exacerbated by the inability to train volunteers because of the immediate needs of the refugees.⁷⁵

New society

Although English language tuition was the first need to be identified by refugee supporters, it was not the primary need for the refugees who were released on TPVs.⁷⁶ A basic allowance was granted by the government which was the equivalent to receiving unemployment benefits. This, coupled with no access to health or housing benefits,⁷⁷ meant that refugees were unable to support themselves from week to week and further assistance was required.⁷⁸ For other refugees this support came through Migrant Resource Centres and Community Refugee Support Services, both of which were Commonwealth Government funded; however because of the funding source, TPV holders were ineligible for their services.

Accommodation needs were initially met by donated housing and by some churches allowing refugees to camp in their halls until other accommodation could be found.⁷⁹ Whilst such arrangements were unsatisfactory, they were suitable for the short term until a more permanent arrangement could be made for the families. It soon became apparent that one of the factors inhibiting housing these refugees was the difficulties in saving for a housing bond. Whilst they could access rent assistance, there was no bond assistance from the government. In response to this need, CARAD developed a scheme of loans for refugees so enabling them to pay the bond and access housing.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Clapton, "Annual Report"

⁷⁶ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

⁷⁷ This is the description of the allowance granted in Rasdien and Mallabone, "Illegal refugees."

⁷⁸ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

⁷⁹ Clapton, "Annual Report"

⁸⁰ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

A further difficulty encountered by TPV holders was that they were ineligible for Medicare and hence were unable to access medical support without paying full fees. Given that they received the equivalent of the Newstart Allowance⁸¹ and, as already noted, were more likely than the general population to be employed in low paid positions, the cost of medical care was prohibitive. This financial factor, coupled with the medical needs resulting from both the previous torture and treatment in detention centres, greatly concerned both refugee advocates and medical professionals alike.⁸² Over time, a network of health professionals developed who were willing to treat refugees at low or no cost.

The need for English classes was addressed through volunteers who would teach conversational English to groups of refugees. A “Welcome House” drop-in centre was started in an inner city Uniting Church premises,⁸³ which at the time were also the site of both the Uniting Church office and the CCWA, who were strong supporters of the refugees. This Welcome House initially provided orientation to the Australian community and conversational English, however as further needs were identified, the services were expanded.⁸⁴ The orientation to Australian society included assistance in setting up bank accounts, applying for Centrelink benefits,⁸⁵ contacting relevant government departments and developing support and friendship networks.⁸⁶

In order for TPV holders to access Centrelink benefits, they were required to apply for a PPV.⁸⁷ However this visa could not be granted in the first three years which caused

⁸¹ The Newstart Allowance is an unemployment benefit and whilst the rate of payment varies according to family size it is a living allowance that assumes a person has some financial reserves and will only be reliant on the allowance for approximately six months.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Centrelink is the Commonwealth Government agency that administers social welfare payments.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ As related to me by an advocate whom I interviewed as part of this research

concern among refugees and their advocates in that an application at this stage may later jeopardise their later protection.⁸⁸ The difficulty with the English language meant that refugees required assistance in completing applications forms and so volunteers assisted in the PPV applications at the Welcome House.⁸⁹ From this voluntary beginning grew CASE for Refugees, an organisation that initially assisted TPV holders in applying for permanent protection.⁹⁰

The work of CASE must be described as a success. Of over a thousand clients assisted by CASE by the end of 2006, only fourteen had been refused permanent protection.⁹¹ Of those who were granted permanent protection, almost 90 had been initially refused on the basis of the “seven-day” rule,^{92, 93} and were subsequently accepted after intervention by CASE. More recently, the work of CASE has focused on assisting the applications for family reunion visas.⁹⁴

To walk alongside

The presence of Christians in the immigration detention centres brought the pastoral and spiritual work of the churches into the centres, initially for Sunday worship, but as time went on, for practical care and support of asylum seekers.⁹⁵ With the involvement of the ministers and priests, congregations soon followed;⁹⁶ as communication networks

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Clapton, 22nd July 2008

⁹⁰ CASE for Refugees, "Annual report 2005-2006,"

<http://www.caseforrefugees.org.au/resources/CASE%20Annual%20Report%202006%20Final.pdf>

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ The “seven day rule” meant that asylum seekers who had spent more than seven days in a country where the government considered they could have obtained effective protection were ineligible for a permanent visa. The Australian Greens, "Policy D7: Immigration and refugees," <http://greens.org.au/node/780>

⁹⁴ CASE for Refugees, "Annual report 2005-2006,"

⁹⁵ Bev Fabb, "Ministry in Port Headland Detention Centre,"

http://assembly.uca.org.au/missiology/reports/ministry_in_pt_hedland_detention_centre

⁹⁶ Ibid.

developed practical and pastoral support also came from congregations that were more distant.

Interested congregations and individuals were encouraged to take action to demonstrate their support of asylum seekers, both to the government and asylum seekers themselves. Individuals bought phone cards to send to those in immigration detention so that family and lawyers could be contacted.⁹⁷ Individuals also wrote letters to asylum seekers to provide contact with Australians.⁹⁸ Those who lived near enough to the detention centres visited the asylum seekers, often enduring harsh conditions themselves so they could offer this support.⁹⁹ The treatment of the visitors reflected the harsh policies by which the detention centres were run. For example, there were occasions of police intimidation of potential visitors and times when advocates were prevented from visiting detainees by the staff simply because of wearing the wrong sorts of shoes.¹⁰⁰

As both asylum seekers and detention centre staff grew to trust the church ministers, the ministers were called in to assist in stressful situations. Fabb, a Uniting Church minister, recounts several anecdotes of being asked to help with asylum seekers who were threatening suicide.¹⁰¹ She was also asked to be on a consultative committee, which included local residents, staff and asylum seekers. These committee meetings were important to asylum seekers although it made little practical difference. Fabb recounts:

I once asked two detainees why they kept on coming to these meetings and presenting their concerns as no one seemed to be listening to them. They

⁹⁷ Christian world service, "Australians welcome refugees" (Sydney: National Council of Churches in Australia, n.d.)

⁹⁸ A collection of these letters is available in *From nothing to zero: Letters from refugees in Australia's detention centres*. (Melbourne: Lonely Planet, 2003)

⁹⁹ Mares and Newman. *Acting from the heart: Australian advocates for asylum seekers tell their stories*

¹⁰⁰ Briskman, Goddard, and Latham. *Human rights overboard*, p. 271ff

¹⁰¹ Fabb, "Ministry in Port Headland Detention Centre"

said “The only reason we come is because you are there. And we know that at least one person on the outside knows what is happening to us.”¹⁰²

Thus the presence of ministers in the detention centres made a difference to the people regardless of the practical realities. The ways in which this presence assisted asylum seekers will be further explored in the section on hope.

Helping voices be heard

The churches, in addition to focusing on the needs of refugees, also aimed to change relevant public policy. This was achieved by raising awareness of the reality in the public arena and by involvement in political processes. Advocacy was provided by a variety of methods including submissions to parliamentary inquiries and contacting local members of parliament. Whilst the latter tended to be the task of individual church members, submissions made were by organisations, such as social justice units, within the church structure.

Raising public awareness occurred through both formal and informal means. The Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission put together a learning circle kit that they hoped would be used in parishes.¹⁰³ It was also designed so that it could easily be adapted for use by the wider population, the major difference being that the latter would have the theological sections removed.¹⁰⁴ This kit aimed to explore issues surrounding refugees and included sections on history, international law and the demonization of asylum seekers in politics and the media.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Theo Mackaay, 23rd July 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Social Responsibilities Commission. *The mustard seed project: "From little things, big things grow": Learning circle kit.* (Perth: Anglican Province of Western Australia, 2005)

Other churches developed resources to encourage people to develop a broader understanding than that which was being presented in the media. The Uniting Church had a series of fact sheets which gave a brief overview of issues such as the warehousing of refugees and the effects of temporary protection.¹⁰⁶ In a similar manner, the materials used for Refugee and Migrant Sunday each year often focused on onshore applicants in Australia instead of their more traditional focus on refugees overseas.¹⁰⁷ Thus where these materials were made available or were used, members of congregations had resources that presented a different view to much of which was portrayed in the media. It was hoped that these would be shared in turn with their friends and families.

Not all media outlets however presented a view that was negative to asylum seekers. Anecdotal evidence gathered by Mares tells of refugee advocates assisting the media in getting information from inside the detention centres.¹⁰⁸ This in turn assisted in educating the broader public who would not have had access to the church resources. As a direct result of working with the journalists, a broader campaign for the humane treatment of refugees developed.¹⁰⁹

At the same time, churches were lobbying politicians and making submissions to parliamentary inquiries in order to advocate for a changed policy towards asylum seekers. From 1994 to 2006 the churches consistently made submissions, both as individual churches and collectively. Throughout this time they were been able to draw on their direct

¹⁰⁶ For example Uniting Care NSW/ACT, "Asylum seekers & refugees," Uniting Church in Australia, http://www.unitingcarenswact.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/16304/AsylumseekersInfoActionSheet.pdf

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Refugee & Migrant Sunday in 2002 was focused on the anniversary of the MV Tampa rescuing a boatload of asylum seekers. National Council of Churches in Australia, "Refugee & migrant Sunday," www.ncca.org.au/__data/page/.../Pacific_Solution_Report_August_2003.pdf

¹⁰⁸ O'Neill. *Blind Conscience*, p. 74ff

¹⁰⁹ E.g. Chilout, a campaign to get children out of the detention centres, started after an ABC Four Corners Programme showing the plight of a particular child in the Villawood Detention centre. Chilout, "An account of Chilout's history," http://www.chilout.org/information/chilout_history.html

work with refugees in order to support their submissions. The effectiveness of the churches submissions increased as public opinion turned against the government's policies. Indeed, the 2006 "back-bench revolt" in which key parts of the government's refugee policy were changed by dissenting coalition members, was largely due to the work of the churches with those politicians.

Conclusion

Immigration detention centres were a major factor in the deteriorating mental health of refugees and asylum seekers. Because of the temporary nature of the visas that were issued, the impetus to address these issues of mental health became a low priority to the Department. Whilst some refugees regained their mental health when the pressures of detention and temporary protection were removed, not all found this to be the case. There is an on-going impact in the lives of those who have been through the immigration detention centres. However, the churches continue to be actively involved in alleviating these stressors even when other organisations are reluctant to be involved. Through a mixture of practical and spiritual support, the churches have helped asylum seekers and refugees of any faith to cope with their situation and change what could be changed. Not surprisingly engagement with such highly traumatised people affected the lives and theologies of those who supported them. The subsequent sections of this thesis will explore the themes that emerged from reflecting on the experiences of supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

Experiences of Suffering



Theology of Darkness
Sin, Suffering & the Evil of the World
Subverting the System
Easter Saturday

I recall one Iranian man that I knew well, who on Christmas day he looked so much happier and at one stage when we were singing Christmas carols or in the service, I noticed he was holding one of the other little children and he looked very happy like children and looked so relaxed and happy and I caught his eye and he caught my eye and he smiled. And then 2 days later, when I was actually having a rest at the local hotel complex with a friend the doctor from, the wife of the doctor from the hospital came and got me and said John thinks that one of your congregation might be in hospital. Anyway, he wants you to come and have a chat to him. So it turned out that this was the very man who looked so happy and he had just tried to commit suicide and was most unhappy to wake up in hospital. He didn't want to live. And it turned out that the reason he looked so happy was that he already decided that he would kill himself. And he had a way out. I suppose in that it's taking some control back of his life. And he was most upset that he'd been saved. And his friend, another friend, Joseph had actually noticed that he wasn't around and found his door was couldn't open it and he'd blocked the door with his bed and they managed to push it open and he got sent to hospital and dealt with and saved. And as I said, he wasn't at all happy about that.

Rev'd Joan

Theology of Darkness

Introduction

Despite their extensive work on suffering and hope, neither Moltmann nor Sölle explored what the sense of utter despair means for those who are suffering. Even Sölle, who spent time listening to the stories of the families of those who disappeared in some of the South American dictatorships of the 1970s does not explore what despair or darkness means to these people. Yet for advocates, darkness was a very common theme given the horror and hopelessness of the detention centres. This vicarious suffering through hearing stories of trauma is to be expected. Suffering has a different quality when there are no real choices. It is one thing to choose to suffer in order to stand alongside other people and something quite different when the suffering is deliberately inflicted and even designed to take away hope. Hope in life was frequently absent from immigration detention. For those in the detention centres the hope of being released into the community was constantly juxtaposed by being told by the staff that they were not wanted and they would not be given a visa.¹ Self-harm and suicide attempts were rife. Yet in the stories of advocates, there are glimpses of the presence of God and to affirm God's presence in suffering is central to the Christian response.

Because neither Moltmann nor Sölle write much about a theology of darkness or related concepts, this chapter has a different structure to the others. There will be no review of their literature, rather the exploration will commence with the reflections of the advocates. During my reflections on the issues raised, I will also draw in relevant writings of the authors.

¹Briskman, Goddard, and Latham. *Human rights overboard*, p. 135

Dark night of the soul

A sense of darkness was common to virtually all the advocates. They also recounted how for asylum seekers, who had no immediate escape from their situation, it often grew into a despairing absence of hope. The situation in which the asylum seekers found themselves was utterly despairing. Assaults from detention centre guards were common, relief from searing temperatures was inadequate or absent and asylum seekers would wake up to find their friends missing, either deported or released.² Because of this, it was easy to lose a vision for the future that could give them hope. In terms of their own distress, several indicated that they had subsequently experienced post-traumatic stress symptoms or depressive episodes; some who had previously been diagnosed with depression had significant exacerbations of their symptoms.

Advocates did not only have to cope with the conditions within the detention centres – often intimidating for visitors – but also the emotional and psychological effects that this had on their friends who were detained. One advocate who was a weekly visitor related:

There were the heart-breaking stories of hearing people committing suicide, sewing their lips together. It was actually when I started [identifying details have been removed here] it was the hottest time and my colleagues at that time were saying it was the worst time ever. There were five or six detainees on the stadium roof. I think at that stage on day 7 of a hunger strike. Other detainees had sewn their lips together... Hearing a lot of the struggles of what they had left behind – their family, their friends, some who were in detention and had lost loved ones. [Rev'd David]

Another supporter spoke of seeing a detainee looking relaxed and happy one Christmas and his subsequent suicide attempt shortly after:

And it turned out that the reason he looked so happy was that he already decided he would kill himself. And he had a way out. [Rev'd Joan]

² Ibid., p. 111ff

This sense of darkness carried on for the supporters when they were away and after their work had ended. One still experienced these symptoms almost five years after Baxter had closed. One advocate related speaking to another who went overseas:

She said things like “I can’t stop thinking about them at night time”, because at that stage there were a lot of our mates in limbo land. [Rev’d Helen]

These feelings of distress appeared to be more pronounced among those who regularly visited asylum seekers in detention than for those people involved in supporting the refugees once they were released. One advocate related:

And you felt for the people and sometimes we saw them and they were just so upset and not knowing what was going to happen next or who was going to be the next victim. It was really awful visiting them at those times. And I often, I got to the stage where I couldn’t sleep at night and I was quite traumatised myself about everything that was happening out there. [Gloria]

With the numerous suicide attempts by the despairing asylum seekers, advocates often also verged on losing hope for their friends as asylum seekers lost the will to live.

To talk to somebody who has lost all hope and who is just straight out down the line tired, is bad enough. But someone who has just no will to do anything; he just said to me “I am tired, I cannot go on.” And I said, “But if you don’t eat, you’ll die.” And he said, “I’m not afraid to die.” [Elizabeth]

With the inadequate counselling services in the detention centres, (see chapter 4) it often fell to the visitors to provide this level of support even when they had not been trained in counselling or pastoral care skills. Rev’d Helen visited Villawood and spoke of a conversation she had with Najam, a detainee on a hunger strike who had attempted suicide not long before. She had just happened to read a book by Victor Frankl and said to him:

I’m asking you if you would just decide to keep on living. And I explained what logotherapy was, it just meant a decision to live the minute and the next minute... [Rev’d Helen]

Sometime after, she heard that it was this conversation enabled Najam to end his hunger strike and find the will to live.

This presence in the inescapable suffering of asylum seekers affected other relationships for advocates. One woman continues to have a very strained relationship with her family because of her attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees. Another related:

I remember distinctly we all went out for a Christmas get together a couple of weeks before Christmas and I was right into the middle of the whole refugee situation and something came up in the conversation and I started to say something about refugees and one of my darling, darling friends, who I love very much, got hold of my knee under the table and said “don’t talk about refugees.” [Barbara]

Many people in the community did not want to know about the situation in which the refugees found themselves. For advocates, supporting refugees and asylum seekers became a significant part of their lives, this meant a fracturing of relationships because of the number of people who did not want to engage in these issues.

We need[ed] to prepare a statement for the courts on his experiences. So two things. He wouldn’t talk very much about it. I said, “Can you remember Kakuma” and he said, “I don’t want to remember it.” And he said he’d been at school in Uganda for a while. And I said, “Was that in a refugee camp?” and he said, “No, that was in a real place.” And I thought that was very revealing. [Rev’d Tom]

Hearing life stories of situations that were so bad that asylum seekers did not want to remember them, clearly had a significant impact on advocates. Another visitor who spoke of being asked to visit the centre as part of his official church position related:

I had a time talking to a person who was looking after the centre first and then went in and met people who whilst you talk about asylum seekers or refugees en masse, you’re always partly entrapped in the mythology which created by the media or particular groups around. But as soon as you start to listen to people’s stories, it becomes very different. I was meeting mums who had been separated from their husbands. Kids, basically who were there with their parents but for whom the detention centre was horrific. And in one sense people were provided with a lot of resources, which is what the detention centre people kept on saying. People have got their TPVs [temporary protection visas] and they have got anything they really ask for, but they were just locked up. And when you were inside you began to realise the way they were treated, because they were treated like dirt. [Rev’d Walter]

He then related how he began to write down people’s stories in case there was any action that could be taken. The detention centre staff demanded that he gave them what

he had written, although this had not been given as a condition of entry. Eventually because of his position, he was allowed to proceed, but he reflected that it gave him insight into what it must be like for those who are in an even more powerless position than he is. This powerlessness was not only evident for the detainees, but also was a reality for those visiting the detention centres.

However, for advocates, God was present in spite of the darkness. They used a variety of theological concepts to make sense of what was happening and to identify the Christian response to the situation in which asylum seekers found themselves. The motif of the crucifixion and resurrection was common in dealing with the issues of the suffering inflicted on asylum seekers. One advocate reflected:

I think God grieves. I think Jesus is crucified again and again in those places. And the resurrection only happens when other people come and roll away the stone. [Rev'd Lyn]

Another reconciled faith and evil in the world by reflecting on the greater impact that light has when it is shining in darkness:

Perhaps one thing I'll add, in one way the presence of evil and violence and suffering in the world highlights the presence of good and love and the presence of God in our lives. So paradoxically, the blacker things are, I shouldn't use the word "black". The darker things seem, the more you see the light, I suppose. So the light of Christ is shining in the darkest places on earth. [Rev'd Tom]

Variations of Rev'd Tom's view were seen in the reflection of other advocates. It was further developed by Rev'd Kathleen who said:

My faith is fairly based on we meet God, we meet Christ in the poor, the suffering, the stranger, the imprisoned, the sick. I guess that just strengthened that side of things.

In the face of the suffering experienced by the refugees and asylum seekers, it was faith in the presence of God in suffering that gave advocates the strength that they needed to continue, particularly for those who actually visited the detention centres.

In some cases among advocates experiences of despair were often the catalyst for deepening faith, although in many cases, advocates already had an understanding of God which had motivated their involvement in the detention centres and refugees. A frequent visitor to the detention centres related:

For the first maybe about four months... my wife was working in the city and I would drop her off and cry on the way because of the sense of the aloneness and the sense of helplessness and the sense of hopelessness. So I learnt to draw upon God. [Rev'd David]

Even in the most despairing times, those who visited the detention centres had an understanding of the presence of God. Reflecting back on the experience, one advocate said:

Well he was there, whatever God, whatever description of God, that was the reality of the depth of life and despair, that was where life really was, in that despair. ... It's something like I guess going beyond just the superficial nature of life. Being faced with the stark reality of someone's vulnerability mentally and physically. It's just something that is there and is so real, I suppose. [Ken]

However, some of the advocates (who tended came from a theologically conservative background) the fact that they were unable to see prayers answered challenged their faith, and in some cases made them rethink how they understood God and their faith.

One advocate related:

It did, absolutely, affirm my faith, and the fact that God is with people in their utter despair and step by step ... I mean it was very slow and I think that's the challenging thing that you don't see instant answers. [Sharon]

In spite of not seeing prayers answered, this in itself was not enough to cause the conservative Christians to experience despair.

In the black parts of life

The themes of darkness, despair and difficulties arose time and time again in the reflections of advocates, yet, as has already been mentioned, little has been written by either Moltmann or Sölle to address the situations which bring out such emotions. At most Moltmann and Sölle explore the metaphor of death and, as has been shown, use it

to describe isolation or loss of vitality to life (see chapter 6). It seems that a theology of darkness encompasses quite different aspects to either Moltmann or Sölle's theology of death.

However, both Moltmann and Sölle draw on the anecdote of Elie Wiesel's regarding the hanging execution of a young boy in Auschwitz.³ Wiesel writes about the child:

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard the same man asking:
'Where is God now?'
And I heard a voice within me answer him:
'Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows...'
That night the soup tasted of corpses.⁴

Wiesel never states whether this was a death of God experience or an experience of God suffering with the people; however, both Moltmann and Sölle have interpreted it as the latter and use the Jewish concept of the Shekinah, the dwelling of God with humanity, to explore it.⁵ However, both Moltmann and Sölle read this as a story to relate that God can, and indeed does, suffer, but do not explore it in connection with the Shekinah.

The consistent engagement with a situation where people were so despairing there were suicide attempts on a regular basis does perhaps push the idea of a theology of darkness to its extreme. This was not a suffering that could be avoided by engaging or not engaging in particular acts. Unlike many of the inhumane situations that led Moltmann and Sölle to write about suffering, there was no alternative but endurance or suicide. Asylum seekers simply had the choice of staying in the inhumane situation of the immigration detention centres, or be deported to where they were likely to face torture

³ Jürgen Moltmann. *The crucified God: The cross of Christ as the foundation and criticism of Christian theology*. Translated by R. A. & Bowden Wilson, John. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 273ff; Dorothee Sölle. *Suffering*. Translated by Everett R. Kalin. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), p. 145ff

⁴ Elie Wiesel. *Night*. Translated by Marion Wiesel. 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. 65

⁵ Shekinah refers to the Divine dwelling with the people (Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 274)

and possible death. Furthermore, the very system which was supposed to give hope of safety to asylum seekers was now geared to stripping it away.

The liberation theologians of South America certainly have wisdom to offer into this reflection on God's presence in suffering. Many of their writings drew on the experiences of the dictatorships in South America during the 1970s. This was the situation for Boff who reflected "*Out of those who are suffering death, the loudest cry for life is coming forth.*"⁶ On the surface, I felt this did not relate to the detention centre scenario pushing people to the despair of attempting suicide, but on further reflection, it was ultimately the hope of life that kept the asylum seekers, even, as we have seen, if a friend was the one who held that hope for them. How can our contemporary theology of suffering stand up to such a situation? In one sense, it cannot. Liberation theology evolved in response to those who could have avoided suffering but chose not to because of their values. Surely when there is a choice to engage in suffering it is a very different situation from that where suffering is systematically inflicted on people. Such institutional suffering greatly compounded the emotional upheaval of having fled homelands in expectation of safety. Being treated inhumanely within a politically endorsed institutional environment when asylum seekers have fled from homelands in hope of new life has a devastating effect, only further exacerbated by friends being deported back into life-denying situations. From this view, Moltmann and Sölle's use of the metaphor of death to depict isolation has little meaning, yet as will later be noted, reducing that isolation is one of the ways that asylum seekers gained and maintained hope.

Connected to this is the question of where God is in times of suffering. It must be said from the start that Moltmann's theology is triune and he argues given the Perichoresis,

⁶ Leonardo Boff. *Ecology & liberation: A new paradigm*. Translated by John Cumming. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), p. xiv emphasis in original.

the mutual indwelling, of the three persons of the Trinity, one cannot say that one part of the Trinity knows something and another does not. However, I do not agree with his analysis. Moltmann draws on the image of the dying Christ crying out “My God, why have you abandoned me?”⁷ (Psalm 22:1) to depict the absence of God. Yet if we do accept this explanation of this death-cry and Moltmann’s assertion of the abandonment by the Father,⁸ then how can this theology be used to assert that God is present in suffering? Since Moltmann uses the Trinitarian term of “Father,” I will follow his custom here, however it must be noted that for the gospel writer, the experience of the crucifixion is an important exception to the rule. This is the one time that Jesus does not refer to “my Father,” but rather “my God.” The implications of the Father abandoning Christ at the point where his sufferings are most extreme creates a tension with the premise asserting that God is with those who suffer. Moltmann goes as far as to argue that “To say that Jesus was forsaken by the Father on the cross means that the Father cast him off and cursed him.”⁹ I see this image of the Father cursing the already suffering Jesus as a very disturbing image indeed. In my view, this raises the question of what such a view of God could possibly say to those in the midst of suffering now. If the Father abandoned Christ in his sufferings, how could that same Father engage with humanity in their suffering? This may not necessarily be Moltmann’s intention, but it is certainly the implication of his image of the Father forsaking and cursing Christ on the cross. To be fair to Moltmann, he does argue that the crucifixion means that “God could be *beside us* in our suffering and with us in our pain,”¹⁰ thus Moltmann does assert that God is with humanity in their suffering, even when this is in seeming contradiction to his other writings.

⁷ For example in Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 227

⁸ Ibid., p. 245

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann. *The way of Jesus Christ: Christology in messianic dimensions*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 80

¹⁰ Jurgen Moltmann. *Jesus Christ for today's world*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 38 emphasis in orig.

However, a further point against Moltmann's position must be noted. Even if we kept Moltmann's distinction between the parts of the Godhead, there would be a serious question over whether God could truly engage in the suffering of humanity if part of God was unable to be present to Christ on the cross. If the "Father" abandoned Christ in the midst of suffering, that part of God is unable to engage in suffering. To argue with Moltmann that in the event of the crucifixion the Father experienced a corresponding abandonment of Christ paints a very egocentric picture of the Father.

If rather than *abandoning* Christ, the God was *present with Christ* in the suffering of the crucifixion, then the assertion that God is with those who suffer can be maintained. Simply because Christ felt abandoned, as is depicted by his use of Psalm 22 does not mean that he actually was abandoned. Romans 3:24-25 states that Christ Jesus was the *ilasteion*, a word used in the Septuagint to also refer to the mercy seat in the temple.¹¹ The mercy seat was in ancient Hebraic understanding considered to be the place where God resides.¹² Thus one can argue that rather than abandoning Christ on the cross, God was uniquely present. As Moltmann himself points out "God was *in* Christ reconciling the world to himself."¹³ This has two important implications. Firstly, this means that all of God has experienced suffering first hand and therefore is able to have compassion on those who suffer. As both Moltmann and Sölle point out "pain is part of love,"¹⁴ therefore a God who cannot suffer cannot love either.

Secondly, if God did not abandon Christ on the cross, then neither does God abandon others when life is difficult. Correspondingly, could we truly trust a God, who forsook Christ at the time of his greatest need, to be present with us in our suffering? The

¹¹ Herrmann, "ἰλαστήριον", in *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 37

¹⁴ Dorothee Sölle. *Against the wind: Memoir of a radical Christian*. Translated by Barbara Rumscheidt and Martin Rumscheidt. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 77

presence of God with Christ in the passion of the cross is the affirmation that those who suffer are also with God. This second point is critical, given that traditionally suffering was seen as a sign of sin and hence separation from God.¹⁵ The practical result of such a view has all too often been either to avoid those who suffer or to try to change them as a person rather than their situation.¹⁶ This further isolates those who suffer and, as we shall see in chapter 6, such isolation can work to strip away hope. Conversely, the affirmation that God is present in suffering becomes a call to Christians to respond to suffering by expressing solidarity with the suffering ones. Implicit in this is the freedom of choice and a willingness to suffer if needed because of standing alongside those who have no choice. Such human expression of compassion affirms the presence of God even where there is suffering.

This theme of God's presence in suffering will be continued in chapter 13, as reflections on the nature of God are explored. However, some considerations of humanity and suffering still need to take place in order to work towards a theology of darkness. Perhaps the most useful biblical book in reflecting on issues of darkness is that of Job. Whilst I am unable to explore in detail an exegesis of the book two points should be noted.

Firstly, Job laments to God about the situation in which he finds himself. His speeches are anything but patient; rather he names his pain directly and in a forthright manner. This affirms that humans can speak directly to God about the situation in which they find themselves. It does not have to be couched in polite language, but rather Job encourages us to speak from the heart about the concerns we have for the world.

¹⁵ Harold S. Kushner. *When bad things happen to good people*. 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. 11

¹⁶ Rose Galvin, "Liberating the disabled identity: A coalition of subjugated knowledges" (PhD, Murdoch, 2004), p. 64

Laments were part of the popular religion of ancient Israel;¹⁷ they are also perhaps a concept that has been lost to the contemporary Church. Laments allow groups and individuals to name the injustices that they experience in their lives and also the changes that they would like to see occur. Laments allow for an open and honest relationship with God and allow humans to wrestle with the issues of injustice that they experience or observe in the world. Naming the injustices and the desired outcome are the start of healing.¹⁸ To express anger may also be part of the process. Indeed as the last few chapters of Job show, expressing anger towards God does not result in retribution.

Secondly, at the end of Job's lamentations and accusations, God does appear and affirms that Job has been heard and he was the one who spoke rightly, rather than his friends who gave pious answers to the issue of suffering. This not only acknowledges that Job's lamentations were right, but also prompts Job's response that he repents of dust and ashes (42:6).¹⁹ At that point, Job no longer has to mourn the separation from God that he had experienced, and his humanity as a suffering person is affirmed. Job's story reminds the reader that patient endurance through suffering, such as that advocated in James 5:11,²⁰ is not the only Christian response. Indeed, one could suggest that such texts have been misused to maintain the status quo and prevent an adequate response to the infliction of suffering by others.

Thus, rather than being the background to other theologies of suffering, experiences of despair, darkness and the difficulties encountered should inform the way humanity

¹⁷ Frank S. Frick. *A journey through the Hebrew scriptures*. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995), p. 432

¹⁸ Dennis Linn, Matthew Linn, and Sheila Fabricant Linn. *Don't forgive too soon : extending the two hands that heal*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 57

¹⁹ Traditionally the translation has been that he repents "in" dust and ashes, however more modern translators have suggested "of dust and ashes" as the more accurate translation (see Dale Patrick, "Translation of Job 42:6", *Vetus testamentum* 26, no. 3 (1976)

²⁰ You have heard of the endurance [patience NKJV] of Job

responds both to God and each other. It is more than simply isolation, as is the focus for both Moltmann and Sölle, and is an important aspect that should not be disregarded. Times of darkness are the points at which the meeting with God takes on a different quality. Such times of darkness, as evidenced in later chapters, are a helpless time in which there only can be reliance on God as the individual can make little difference. It is also a time when the relationship between individuals and God is most severely tested. At these times, there is little wonder that people join in the cry “My God, why have you abandoned me?”

However, the question must be raised as to whether an authentic theology can be derived from the experiences of such darkness without immediately turning to the concept of hope. Would such a theology ultimately be hopeful or depressing? The remaining chapters in this section will explore various aspects of a theology arising from the experience of suffering and the ways in which Christians have responded to such darkness.

Five Star Hell

Some people did not use their imagination when they swallowed government propaganda and described refugees incarcerated in Baxter Detention Centre as living in Five Star accommodation. November 4th 2002.

I dreamt I lived in a two star shack,
And "Freedom" was its name;
It was at the end of a well worn track,
With a dozen, much the same.

And my daughter laughed as she ran around,
Looking for shiny stones;
And she laughed for joy at what she found,
A pebble and some old bleached bones.

My heart was full as we watched the sun,
Over the horizon fall;
And we all held hands and felt as one,
As we sat on the old stone wall.

The cruellest part is when you wake,
To the sound of the prison bell;
And wonder if this is the day you'll break,
In Baxter five star Hell.

-AN

Sin, Suffering and the Evil of the world

Introduction

Christian theology has long struggled with the issue of evil in the world. If God is said to be all powerful, all knowing and good, why is it that evil occurs? We can read of explanations throughout the biblical text, which starting from Genesis right the way through to Revelation, frequently deals with the issue of evil in the good world. This theme has been picked up by many theologians over the years including Moltmann and Sölle as they have both struggled to explore the concept of suffering in our world. Much of what occurred in the immigration detention centres can only be described as evil. Incidents were documented of systematic abuse, use of psychotropic drugs as a form of punishment and even toddlers being kept in solitary confinement with their parents.¹ In the face of the suffering inflicted by the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, the nature of evil was important to the theological understanding of the advocates. In response to such mistreatment, the question must be asked yet again how one can speak of a good God in a world in which these events can occur. This chapter explores this question in conversation with Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates.

Defining Sin

Moltmann explores the concept of sin throughout his works. In particular he uses the metaphor of death to explore this concept, drawing on the biblical affirmation that “the wages of sin is death.”² However he also turns this statement around and argues that sin is the wages of death:

¹ For documentation of these incidents, see Briskman, Goddard, and Latham. *Human rights overboard*, p. 111ff

² Romans 6:23

It is the awareness of death which first creates fear for life, the fear of not getting one's fair share, of not having enough from life, the fear that life will be cut short. This leads to a craving for life, and greed.³

In this statement, Moltmann suggests that it is because humans are mortal that we are lead into sin. This turning around of the connection between death and sin has been seen as a problem by some theologians. Volf, for instance writes, "Rooting sin in death is highly problematic, however. Nothing suggests that we kill, let alone commit all other sins, only because we cannot endure mortality, as Moltmann argues."⁴ However, here I disagree with Volf and side with Moltmann. There is a sense in which anxiety about death can produce psychological, emotional and physical responses which are destructive to self and others. As McKibben points out "we will spend money to guard our own well-being, but we won't pay to safeguard our collective health."⁵ This individualisation out of fear of death leads to the sin of taking resources from those who need it most.

For Moltmann, this sin is not the contravention of regulations created by God, but rather the "separation from God and from the life which God gives"⁶ This separation from God also inherently involves the separation from other people and the environment in which we live. Of particular importance in this issue is the link between oppression and sin. For Moltmann, liberation is not just something for those experiencing oppression; the oppressors also need to be liberated themselves.⁷ He explained that the blindness of the oppressors must be healed and "they must recognise themselves *with* the eyes of

³ Jürgen Moltmann. *The coming of God: Christian eschatology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 93

⁴ Miroslav Volf, "After Moltmann: Reflections on the future of eschatology," in *God will be all in all: The eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 249

⁵ Bill McKibben, "Water, water everywhere", *Sojourners: Faith in action for social justice* 39, no. 6 (2010), p. 14

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann. *In the end, the beginning: The life of hope*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 93

⁷ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 230

their victims, or better: *in the eyes of their victims.*”⁸ In other words, they will then no longer be able to see themselves as separate from the suffering ones. Such liberation of the oppressors would free them to disengage from behaviours that cause others to suffer. This recognition of the social implications of sin demonstrates that Moltmann’s view of hope is not simply for the hereafter, which could be argued based on his *Theology of Hope*, but rather constantly affirms the need for enacting the reign of God today.⁹

Another way in which Moltmann describes sin is as the “self-closing of open systems against their own time and their own potentialities.”¹⁰ It is the deliberate cutting off of potentiality and preventing the self from reaching its fullest potential. This leaves a person stuck in the present and unable or unwilling to engage in the future.¹¹ It is a concept that also brings into focus the social dimension of sin, yet at the same time, it can be applied to individuals within a social setting. With regards to a social level, Moltmann writes:

If a human society settles down as a closed system, seeking to be self-sufficient, then something similar happens: a society of this kind will project its own present into the future and will merely repeat the form it has already acquired. For this society the future ceases to offer scope for possible change; and in this way the society also surrenders its freedom.¹²

By not being open to the future and possible change, such a society perpetuates the way that it has dealt with issues in the past and does not learn from advances in human knowledge. It also does not allow for the possibility of growth and change for the

⁸ Ibid., p. 230

⁹ I first became aware that this was his view on reading his autobiography *A Broad Place* where he says that an other-worldly view of hope had never been his view; this was reinforced in *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, written a few years after *Theology of hope* wherein he makes the same claim. For example this other-worldly critique is found in John Macquarrie, “Today’s word for today”, *The Expository Times* 92, no. 1 (1980), p. 5

¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann. *The future of creation*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 122

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

people within it and therefore continues to marginalise members who do experience something different.

Like many other key concepts in Moltmann's theology, this double nature of sin can be seen as connecting to his experiences in the Second World War. Not only was he drafted into the German army, but he also had an awareness of what was happening to the Jews. Moltmann writes of meeting his father:

He had come in order to entrust me with a frightful discovery. In Minsk he had heard about the mass murder of Jews and had seen the mass graves for himself. He didn't know what the consequences ought to be for him personally, but he wanted me to know as well. This completely put a stop to my willingness to serve in the war.¹³

Thus for Moltmann personally there was the dichotomy between of the individual and corporate nature of sin. On the one side there was the systemic slaughter of Jews and other unwanted people which represented the societal aspect of sin. On the other side there was his individual responsibility to his country and the protection of his family. This conflict became resolved for Moltmann through his concept of the "self closing of open systems." Rather than focussing on the system, which can be perceived as all too hard to change, Moltmann sees sin as the system's "self-closing." An individual is still free to become open to the ways in which he or she acts within the world. In this way there is the balance between acknowledging the societal aspects of sin without either removing individual responsibility or focusing on that which is difficult to change.

Death vs. Life

Suffering is inherently part of both death and life, two concepts which are for Moltmann inseparable, yet whilst death is the antithesis of life, life can be lived in the presence of death. Death, for Moltmann, is the final frontier at which suffering is experienced;¹⁴

¹³ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 20

¹⁴ Jurgen Moltmann. *Theology of hope: On the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*. Translated by James W. Leitch. 5th ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 131-132

however, life and death can exist alongside each other. Moltmann appears to see life and death as a continuum for he argues that death is not a boundary of life otherwise “God remains a God of the living.”¹⁵ Moltmann suggests there can be hope even in the face of death because God’s relationship with humanity continues beyond death.¹⁶

Although Moltmann sees hope in death, it is also the experience of the latter which gave rise to his reflections on suffering. He writes:

But in that catastrophic night [during the firebombing of Hamburg], for the first time in my life I cried out to God “God, where are you?” That was my question in the face of death.¹⁷

However, it is not only Moltmann’s personal experiences of death which have given rise to his reflections on suffering and hope. He also draws upon the suffering and deaths of other people – particularly from the developing countries, such as in South America, as well as the potential planetary death which we are facing from the current ecological crisis.¹⁸

In the symbolic language of Moltmann’s theology, death is more than the physical death. He suggests that people can be physically alive but dead in other ways. Death is also an emotional or physical state of disengagement and turning inwards. In this case death is the “freezing into lifelessness oneself.”¹⁹ In this way, death becomes the inability to live fully; a “dead” person is one who is unable to connect with others and with life. This freezing of life occurs when people are “afraid of life” a position which reduces people’s ability to engage in the issues faced by and in the world.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 131

¹⁶ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 106

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 34

¹⁸ For example in the introduction to Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 1

¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann. *The Spirit of life: A universal affirmation*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. xii

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann. *Experiences of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 21

This immediacy of living more fully is also developed in relation to Moltmann's struggle with doing theology "after Auschwitz". These mass deaths have, for Moltmann, challenged the ways in which it is permissible to talk about God in a suffering world. He argues: "What we dare to say about God "after Auschwitz" surely depends on what we can say about God after the event on Golgotha."²¹ Although the connections of these two events may be offensive to some, Moltmann argues that they are integral to making sense of the latter concept with the experience of abandonment of Jesus on the cross echoing the questions of those who were touched by the death camps, namely where was God?²²

With such a background, an affirmation of resurrection becomes integrally important; resurrection gives hope for those who have been annihilated, yet such hope does not "permit us to come to terms with their annihilation."²³ This distinction is critical, for without it one could easily slip into apathy about changing the situation for those who are suffering in the here-and-now. For Moltmann, questions about God in suffering have constantly linked back to the need for justice and reconciliation.²⁴

At the same time, Moltmann argues that suffering is only experienced in death because of love. "It is only in the thing a man loves that he can be hurt, and it is only in love that man suffers and recognises the deadliness of death."²⁵ If there is no emotional connection to the person who has died, then, according to Moltmann's reasoning, there will be no suffering associated with that person's death. Life before death then becomes a focus on being and experiencing each "truly and wholly lived moment,"²⁶ which

²¹ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 191

²² Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 278

²³ Jürgen Moltmann. *God in creation: An ecological doctrine of creation: The Gifford lectures 1984-1985*. Translated by Margaret Kohl, Gifford lectures. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 92

²⁴ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. xi

²⁵ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 208

²⁶ Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 137

Moltmann calls “eternal life before death.”²⁷ Thus, whilst death and suffering remain part of life, it does not limit the life that is lived. This too argues against an other-worldly concept of hope and rather involves living fully in love and life in the here and now.

Thus as we have seen, Moltmann suggests the experiences of suffering are heightened because of the emotional connection to those who suffer or are lost through that suffering. Sin arises in humanity’s quest to avoid the suffering and so relationships are broken and the self is elevated to an extreme above the needs of others. It is this combination of events that causes the suffering in our world and continues to perpetuate it.

Sin in Relationships

Sölle sees sin as primarily the separation of humanity from God.²⁸ However, she does not interpret this in what she sees as its traditional sense of being a personal schism in that relationship, but rather:

Sin means being separated from the foundation of life, disturbed in our relation to:

- Ourselves
- Our neighbours
- Creation
- The human family²⁹

It was perhaps the complicity of the German people in the events of the Second World War that lead to this understanding of sin.³⁰ Indeed, as Schottroff notes, Sölle’s concept of sin is often in contradiction to what she sees as Lutheran teachings: she suggests that

²⁷ Ibid., p. 137

²⁸ Dorothee Sölle and Luise Schottroff. *Jesus of Nazareth*. Translated by John Bowden. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 128

²⁹ Dorothee Sölle. *The arms race kills even without war*. Translated by Gerhard A. Elston. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 89

³⁰ Jeannine M. Graham. *Representation and substitution in the atonement theologies of Dorothee Sölle, John Macquarrie, and Karl Barth*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 24

sin is not so much in “action” but in “resignation.”³¹ This means that the whole of life has an impact on the relationship between humanity and God, not just the religious aspects. Sölle sees sins against other peoples as “the great sin which separates us from God and brings us to hate ourselves.”³² Thus relationships are at the core of Sölle’s view of sin and in turn her view of Christian life. However, it is important to note that it is not only relationships with people in our immediate vicinity which is important to Sölle. Indeed, she argues:

Of course, I am aware of individual sins of which I accuse myself, but I believe they take up less room in my life. What I suffer from, and what I need and seek forgiveness for, are all the disastrous things that we, as a society, inflict today on the poorest of the poor and on our mother, the earth.³³

Sölle realises that societal sin is often inherited, but despite the fact that the situation may have been thrust on to those born into it, she argues that people are also “responsible for the house which [they] did not build but in which [they] live.”³⁴ Therefore, sin is not so much a moral concept or something internal to the person,³⁵ as it is the ways in which people relate to each other. Thus according to Sölle, there is a need to work against the power structures that are imposed by our countries which keep other people in a condition of suffering. Because of this, views of Christianity that see faith as neutral in the face of suffering are actually a false Christianity.³⁶

Sölle explores this concept and argues that sin equates to the power and domination of others, particularly in “closed economic situations which does not function for human

³¹ Luise Schottroff, ““Come read with my eyes”: Dorothee Sölle’s biblical hermeneutics of liberation,” in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 51

³² Dorothee Sölle and Fulbert Steffensky. *Not just yes and amen: Christians with a cause*. Translated by unknown. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 3

³³ Sölle. *Against the wind*, p. 31

³⁴ Dorothee Sölle. *Thinking about God: An introduction to theology*. Translated by John Bowden. (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 55

³⁵ Graham. *Representation and substitution*, p. 67

³⁶ Martin Rumscheidt, “A calling in a higher sense: The poetics of Dorothee Sölle,” in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 84

needs but for the profits of the owners.”³⁷ Sin becomes the injustice that restricts other lives and dominates them.

In extending the concept of sin into the rupture of relationships, Sölle suggests that a key element to this is the deliberate isolation that is prevalent in our society. This fracturing can be between people or between humanity and creation. Sölle likens this isolation to death and argues this:

[Isolation] means being alone and then wanting to be left alone; being friendless, yet distrusting and despising others; forgetting others and then being forgotten; living only for ourselves and then feeling unneeded; being unconcerned about others and wanting no one to be concerned about us; neither laughing nor being laughed at; neither crying for another nor being cried for by another.³⁸

Sölle draws on the work of Karl Marx to argue that isolation also includes the isolation from one’s own feelings, a situation that leads to apathy.³⁹ This isolation from other people, in Sölle’s view, leads to a toleration of death in other people.⁴⁰ It no longer matters that other people are suffering, because it does not affect “us”. Thus this isolation leads to a tolerance of the situation in which other people can suffer and hence to sin.

It is in this way that Sölle sees death as being the “wages of sin”;⁴¹ death is the disconnection from other humans and thence a fear of others develops which further isolates individuals.⁴² She suggests “death is what takes place within us when we look upon others not as gift, blessing or stimulus but as threat, danger, competition.”⁴³ This in turn leads to a disconnection from the suffering in the world. Thus, isolation

³⁷ Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 91

³⁸ Dorothee Sölle. *Death by bread alone: Texts and reflections on religious experience*. Translated by David L Scheidt. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 3-4

³⁹ Sölle. *Strength of the weak*, p. 26

⁴⁰ Sölle. *Death by bread alone*, p. 9

⁴¹ Romans 6:23

⁴² Dorothee Sölle. *The mystery of death*. Translated by Nancy Lukens-Rumscheidt and Martin Lukens-Rumscheidt. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 121

⁴³ Sölle. *Death by bread alone*, p. 4

becomes one element of sin as a rupture of relationships even when this is applied to the ways in which the poor of other countries are treated.

One of the possible responses to suffering and pain is, for Sölle, its expression in language. She suggests that “by giving voice to lament one can intercept and work on this suffering within the framework of communication.”⁴⁴ It is through language that change can occur, not only of the situation, but also of the people who find themselves in it. Sölle suggests:

If people are not to remain unchanged in suffering, if they are not to be blind and deaf to the pain of others, if they are to move from purely passive endurance to suffering that can humanise them in a productive way, then one of the things they need is language.⁴⁵

According to Sölle, it is this ability to communicate their suffering which prevents people from being destroyed by their affliction.⁴⁶ This is of particular importance, because Sölle suggests that suffering (death) always “*affects* another person or persons, never death in the abstract.”⁴⁷ By being able to name and talk about the experiences of suffering, isolation is broken down and relationships begin to be reformed and transformed.

However, Graham questions whether Sölle’s concept of sin “is radical enough.”⁴⁸ As we see later in this chapter, her emphasis on the societal aspect of sin, and particularly her reinterpretation of original sin in the light of this aspect, can serve to disempower people from making changes that are necessary to remove injustice.

⁴⁴ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 74

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 75

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 76

⁴⁷ Dorothee Sölle. *Christ the representative: An essay in theology after the 'Death of God'*. Translated by David Lewis. (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 11

⁴⁸ Graham. *Representation and substitution*, p. 67

The Evil of the World

Although few advocates spoke about sin, when they were asked how they reconciled their faith with the presence of evil in the world, the denial of God's role in causing the suffering of the refugees was virtually universal. Only one advocate saw that there was a little responsibility from God because there was a "degree of God's culpability in that of creating a world in which it is possible to deny God" [Rev'd Walter]. He saw that given God created a world in which it is possible for evil to exist, God was therefore ultimately responsible for the presence of evil in the world. However, others saw no connection between God and the suffering experienced by the refugees and asylum seekers:

No way would God happily sit by and let that happen, that's okay, cause it's meant to be because there's a purpose coming from it down the track. [Linda]

But it's certainly not a God who imposes suffering. That's where I come from, anyway, it's like people will say, "Why does God let this happen?" Well, it's nothing to do with God. I don't believe that God controls what happens in the world, really. [Betty]

I don't think God imposes suffering and wars. I think that happens because we human beings, we are given free will and freedom of choice. And I think greed, whatever, brings that on us. But I think in all of that, I mean no God, whoever would impose the suffering on Zimbabwe that they're going through now, or the Sudanese people... I mean, God in his wisdom would have never said, "Yes, I'll just send that down there and sort that lot out." [Elizabeth]

There was a much more common view among advocates that humans were ultimately responsible for the evil that occurred in the world and this was attributed to a variety of reasons. For some of the advocates, it was because humanity has been given free will that there is the possibility of evil. Yet advocates argued that whether or not one does evil is a choice of an individual rather than being a predisposition.

My attitude is that there seems to me to be in this world power for good and power for evil. And I have the choice as to which I will go for. [James]

Well, I don't really blame God in saying what you, you know, "how can you be God if you let these things happen?" Because I guess I'm a strong believer in

that we are all free beings that we all make choices, that some people make bad choices which affect others. [Rev'd Dorothy]

Other advocates expressed that evil was also because of the inaction to amend what had occurred. Inaction is, according to many of the advocates, as much a cause of evil as the action that is its primary cause.

Well, there's suffering in the world because people are greedy and people are selfish. And there's suffering in the world because there are people who hang onto power, who are totally corrupt and as long as the rest of the world stands by and lets it happen, it's just going to continue. [Rev'd Lyn]

The intention of those causing the suffering may not necessarily be to create the hardship for other people. Advocates suggested that in many cases it is an addiction to power or possessions that leads to actions that cause suffering, even though people are not aware this is an outcome.

So if I got a house with 15 rooms, the world now teaches, yes, go for it, it's your life. So if I gobble up all the resources just to satisfy my whim or my dream and think that "ah, no worries, this is my dream and I'm paying for it." But someone else is going to pay for it. [George]

For George the fact that some people took more than their fair share of resources meant that others had to go without. There is a ripping out effect which sees greed in some portions of society leading to poverty for others.

One advocate used a completely different framework to reflect on evil and it is worth exploring this viewpoint in more detail. Rev'd Gary, who is a minister in a major church reflected:

There is suffering and there will be suffering. Suffering comes from humanity. I have a theology that evil is good "fermented." You know, fermented good. God creates good things, he allows good things, we let them go to waste, we let them rot. We abuse it, use too much of it, exploit it and instead of sharing it, we hang onto it. I believe money is of the devil, I've always believed money is of the devil, but if God created money, not a problem. If God created a trading system of value for value, but we exploit it, so what have we got? Evil.

Rev'd Gary saw creation as inherently good, but is of the opinion it has the potential to be misused in ways that create evil in the world. This is somewhat different to addiction to power as it also implies the hoarding of the good, which generates evil. The view of "fermented good" allows for the possibility that all creation has the potential for good, but when it is not used or shared then it can turn to evil. Whilst this has the possibility of being similar to the theology of free will – human choice to misuse the gifts given – it also allows for the goodness in what is given rather than devaluing whole systems, such as money, as being a source of evil. Nothing is intrinsically evil in itself, but rather the ways in which they are used can be turned to good or evil.

Similarly, only a few advocates spoke of a force for evil although they deconstructed the view of that force as a living being.

I was saying that whatever God is, it's the positive energy in the world. And whatever we consider to be the devil, which I don't believe in, it's the negative side of things. I think in every experience in life, you have the opportunity of looking at something positively or looking at it negatively. Most of the time, I think to be honest, most of the time I think we go for the easy way. When our better nature is engaged, then things happen which are positive. [James]

And there is a God, but there's some other opposing force out there too, that's pushing against it. I don't really like the world "devil", but there's certainly evil elements or negative elements that work against... this great master plan. [Sandra]

Several advocates raised the question of where God is in the suffering that happens in the world. Charles spoke of God being with the oppressed, which was a common theme among those who reflected on the presence or absence of God in what they saw within the detention centres. Rev'd David spoke of wrestling with God in response to what he was experiencing. For Rev'd Tom there was a sense of being close to God when he was with those who were suffering. This sense of presence of God will be discussed in further detail in chapter 13. However, it is worth noting here that it was a strong point in the context of making sense of the evil which advocates saw in the system.

In their discussion on the causes of suffering, two images of God frequently recurred for advocates, one being the life of Jesus and the other being his crucifixion. For advocates, the life and death of Jesus symbolised God's connection with the world in a very real sense.

Well, definitely the crucifixion. You couldn't get much more suffering than that. The thought of, you know, God giving up his only son for humanity to die such a gruesome, horrible death, and a painful death after doing nothing but trying to help and be good is really perhaps, says, well, if Jesus had to go through that then it must be necessary for humans to go through it as well. [Sandra]

But I think when you regard the fact that Jesus himself was so human in what he went through, he knows what we go through because of our weaknesses. And I think somewhere along the line he gives us this strength to cope with what comes our way. But in that we have to have enough hope and faith in him to let go. [Elizabeth]

That Jesus experienced suffering was important to many advocates. This was the event which meant that God knows what it is to suffer and therefore has experienced the worst of the evil the world can produce. This suffering means that God is with humanity in their suffering and in many ways stands to refute the image of a god who inflicts suffering on humanity.

Fermented Good

The different ways in which the voices of Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates view sin and evil can generate a deeper understanding of the issues involved. In particular I will be using the reflections of Rev'd Gary about evil being fermented good, as this provides a radically different way of examining the nature of evil and hence of sin. As has already been noted, Moltmann and Sölle both use the definition of sin as a rupture of the relationship with God and they redefine this to focus on the social aspects of sin. Contemporary Western theologians writing on modern interpretations of sin also start

with this view.⁴⁹ For Moltmann and Sölle, sin is not simply an individual committing spiritual acts, but rather their focus is how sin impacts on the people around, including those in other countries. Advocates, on the other hand, did not so much explore sin, but rather why evil occurs in the world, yet their experiences have the potential to deepen the understanding of sin that is presented by Moltmann and Sölle.

If sin is a societal concept then, as Sölle notes, people can be guilty by virtue of the society and culture into which they are born.⁵⁰ This would imply that all people of certain cultures and societies are inherently sinful and can do little to change this, whilst others are ipso facto innocent. Sin and innocence are rarely that definitive. A person, as is often the case, can be both the victim and the oppressor and Sölle's descriptions of the societal aspects of sin do not appear to recognise this. This way of viewing sin can also have the element of disempowering people: change in a society is much more difficult for individuals to effect than change in oneself. Further, those who are living counter-cultural lives, such as those of the advocates, need to be recognised in such a framework.

Moltmann's view of sin is perhaps a better framework for his description of sin as the "self-closing of open systems,"⁵¹ as has already been noted, the double effect of emphasising societal aspects of sin and also the difference that an individual can make. Thus, whilst the society can become a closed system, as occurred during the years of the harsh immigration detention system, individuals within it can maintain their openness to living in opposition to such systems. As we have seen, not all of society supported the immigration detention centres and some people maintained actions that were counter to the cultural norm of maligning asylum seekers.

⁴⁹ Such as Jerry D. Korsmeyer. *Evolution and Eden: Balancing original sin and contemporary science*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), p. 121

⁵⁰ Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 54

⁵¹ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 122

In spite or perhaps because of their experiences with the potential evil that can be instigated by society, advocates generally had a higher view of humanity than either Moltmann or Sölle. They suggested that humans have the capacity to choose for good or evil. This means that no one is inherently devalued. This is explored in more detail, as we have seen, in the concept of evil as “fermented good.” For example, with money and other resources, it is possible to change the lives of the poor of the world and create a more equitable living, yet when groups hoard resources, then a situation is created whereby many individuals do not have even their basic needs met.

This view seems to connect with Moltmann's view of sin as the self-closing of open systems. Firstly, it affirms that the world and all that is in it is good and does so in a radical way. The Genesis 1 creation story affirms that at almost every stage of creation the cosmos is pronounced as being good and therefore the goodness of God's creation is maintained although it has since been corrupted.⁵² Indeed, the view of evil as “fermented good” goes further and argues that even the human-made aspects of the environment are good if they are used properly. This in itself brings hope as it allows for the possibility of any created thing to change lives for the better. Whether this concept can be applied to the great environmental disasters of our day is a separate question and would be another thesis in itself.

Secondly, both Moltmann and Rev'd Gary's view presented a view of humanity and the causes of evil which neither sees humans as unable to do good, nor attributes it an outside power influencing humanity. In the same way that the concept of fermented good affirms the goodness of the cosmos, it also affirms the basic goodness of humanity as part of that cosmos. At this point, the wealth of information on the influences of human development must be acknowledged. The complexities of situations such as

⁵² Interestingly, the only point at which the goodness is not affirmed is the separation of heaven from earth and with such a separation also came the separation of the residence of God from that of the rest of creation (Gen 1:6-8).

physical or emotional violence that can cause the human potential to ferment cannot be explored in a way that does them justice. Suffice to say that when the human potential ferments, there is the real possibility of humans inflicting suffering on others, yet where the fermentation is not started or not complete, humanity is able to demonstrate love and justice for the whole cosmos.

Thirdly, this viewpoint assumes humanity has the potential to make choices that will limit the sin and therefore will assist in empowering them to work with God towards a world without suffering. This not only affirms the work of the advocates in creating a more just society, but it also gives hope to the oppressed people of the world and to those who stand alongside them. Here sin is no longer a concept that requires forgiveness and changed actions, it becomes a choice that can be taken or countered; it is choices that result in suffering that call for forgiveness. The extent to which individuals have choice will vary according to their life situation. For those of us in the western culture, there is a definite choice possible as to whether we engage in the aspects of our society that can be named as sinful. Sin is, then, a negative way of responding to the gifts of the cosmos.

The question must be raised as to why fermentation of good can occur. To continue playing with the metaphor of fermentation, the conditions must be right to promote the process. Not only is there the need to add ingredients to start the fermentation of wine, but also the oxygen must be limited. There is also a time element to be considered for fermentation takes place over a period of time during which the structure of the sugars transforms into alcohol. To draw on this imagery suggest that there is a combination of nature and nurture behind the fermentation of good. Although people have within them the potential to do both good and evil, in the same way that grapes have the potential to ferment but will not necessarily do so, there is also the need for the right circumstances to develop that fermentation. Such circumstances could be as localised as family values

or past trauma, or be on a broader scale such as the fear campaign against migrants and asylum seekers which was conducted during the Howard government's rule. The difficulty with this image is that fermentation implies there can be no improvement once the process has started. Rather than suggesting that fermented good means that once a person or thing has become evil there is no turning back, this is the point at which the work of God is affirmed. Humanly speaking, fermentation cannot be reversed, but through God's grace there is the possibility for forgiveness and a new start. In this way, sin and evil do not have the final word, but rather this lies within God's grace.

And you know, you'd meet people in the visitor's centre. And the rigmarole you had to go through, you almost were strip-searched. And the ingenuity of human nature, as it is, there's lots of things you can get away with. And in a way it kind of kept your sense of humanity. Like you felt you were one step ahead, too bad if you got caught. A few people got banned because they did get caught with various things. But it's amazing what you can fit down your bra! And just little things that, just the fact that you'd snuck it in like that kind of inside you had this psychological edge on, you know, on the systems.

It was the system not individuals in the system, because the people who worked there were traumatised as well it was terrible. So Juliette came home one week and said Janice, do you know there are six women out there expecting babies? Can you imagine that? Six women. Four of them expecting their first and two other had had other children. And I thought that's terrible. And then they'd be coming in here and already I felt the antagonism here at the hospital had, was in somewhat excepted because of their experience at Woomera which is just up the road. Women having babies were brought down from up there too. Can't speak a word of English, no one here to interpret for them. And of course they came across as being total, like one woman said to me, this is the part I found the most traumatic, one of the chief midwives here said to me one night, well you know, she wouldn't speak English but she knew once the pain levels got high enough she knew how to ask for pethadine when it got bad enough.

Rev'd Janice

Subverting the system

Introduction

In the light of the suffering that occurs in the world, the appropriate Christian response must be articulated. Is this response limited to theorising about the rationale for the presence of suffering in the world, as Sölle would argue has happened for so long, or is there a further response that can be taken and be called “Christian”? For those who have been involved in Social Justice, and I count myself as one, the basis of Christian social action includes the actions of Jesus, who gospel stories show included the outcasts of society and challenged those in power. Not surprisingly, this perspective was also that of the refugee advocates: the Christian response to the suffering of asylum seekers and refugees was to challenge the systems which created the suffering. When that did not make the changes required, advocates quite simply subverted the system to create a more humane life for those in detention. Although Moltmann and Sölle write of actions which ultimately can subvert a system, their relevant theologies do not address this aspect directly.

A Political Theology

Sölle writes of two aspects which combine to subvert unjust systems of the world, namely relationships and action. Whilst the connection between change and action is obvious, the rationale for including relationships here is not necessarily apparent. In exploring relationships, Sölle has two main foci: firstly how relationships affect people, particularly in respect to their suffering, and secondly what it means for humanity to have a relationship with God. It will only be the former of these two aspects which will be discussed here. Sölle argues that “relationship is central to human life... yet

relationship under capitalism is a commodity.”¹ That is, there is an increasing trend in the western world in which relationships are developed for the benefit of an individual’s gain and not out of mutuality. It is this aspect of relationships which is not only restrictive to the people engaged in them but is also damaging. Such damage is not limited to those directly involved for it can affect people across the globe. As a commodity, relationship ceases to have value in itself, but instead is valued for what it can bring to the consumer.²

It’s a problem of the rich world and the so-called first world that we live in apartheid, that we live behind that nice wall and get to know about the nice cheap bananas and nice coffee we get from these poor countries and we know of a lot of things we can have and buy, and go to, but our perspective is still the perspective of a tourist and not the perspective of a sister or brother.³

For Sölle, such relationships are damaging, not only to the people being exploited, but also to those who perpetrate acts of exploitation,⁴ and thus decreases the humanity of both. She cautions against assuming that one knows what oppressed peoples need without first being in relationship, otherwise they become a “commodity” to be manipulated.⁵

Rather than this contemporary form of isolated relationships, Sölle suggests that interdependence is the Christian way of being which liberates “creative energy, vitality that is needed.”⁶ Of importance is sharing the life which has been given: “When you spread your life around rather than hoarding it, then the great light becomes visible

¹ Dorothee Sölle. *To work and to love: A theology of creation*. Translated by Shirley A. Cloyes. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 116

² Ibid., p. 113

³ Beyers Naudé and Dorothee Sölle. *Hope for faith: A conversation*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), p. 9

⁴ Dorothee Sölle. *Beyond mere obedience*. Translated by Lawrence W. Denef. (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), p. 35

⁵ Christine E Gudorf, "Dorothee Sölle, feminism, and medieval woman mystics," in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 165

⁶ Sölle. *Mystery of death*, p. 80

within you.”⁷ Simply to seek one’s own needs in a relationship is destructive,⁸ but to give out to others benefits both. Therefore to seek out relationships which are mutual and to develop relationships between the oppressed people and those with power are actions which in themselves work to subvert systems of injustice. She invites her “readers into active solidarity with the victimised for the sake of justice and transformation of the world.”⁹ It is only as these relationships develop that action can occur which is to the benefit of those who are suffering the most.

Sölle sees the correct Christian response to the suffering in the world as being that of alleviating it. In doing so, she critiques the traditional Lutheran focus on dogma, particularly regarding human weakness that says “our strength must fail us.”¹⁰ Sölle offers a choice:

Only those who themselves are suffering will work for the abolition of conditions under which people are exposed to senseless, patently unnecessary suffering, such as hunger, oppression, or torture. Are we going to ally ourselves with them – or are we going to remain on the other side of the barrier?¹¹

This is not a choice about action or inaction, but rather whether one supports the oppressed or the oppressors.¹² Sölle argues that if one does not take an active stance to oppose an unjust situation, then, by doing nothing, the injustice is allowed to continue. There is no neutral ground. Either one actively opposes injustice or, by action or omission, one is supporting it.

⁷ Dorothee Sölle. *Theology for skeptics: Reflections on God*. Translated by Joyce Irwin. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 104

⁸ Dorothee Sölle. *Of war and love*. Translated by Rita Kimber and Robert Kimber. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), p. xi-xii

⁹ Flora A Keshgegian, "Witnessing Trauma: Dorothee Sölle's theology of suffering in a world of victimisation," in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 99

¹⁰ Luise Schottroff, "'Come read with my eyes': Dorothee Sölle's biblical hermeneutics of liberation," *Ibid.*, p. 47

¹¹ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 2-3

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5

Sölle sees the need for action as an outcome arising from the assertion of God's love for the world:

That God loves all of us and each and every individual is a universal theological truth which without translation becomes the universal lie. The translation of this proposition is world-transforming praxis.¹³

Therefore, to assert God's love without choosing to participate in and act out God's love is to sin and to perpetuate the suffering which is occurring to others around the world. At the same time, Sölle sees Christian participation in and claiming the suffering of the Christian story as essential to this process. She writes "A Christianity that is free of suffering leaves suffering to others."¹⁴ Sölle argues that in this way theory and praxis cannot be separated, yet sees this as exactly what is happening in contemporary Christianity.¹⁵ Indeed, Rumscheidt suggests that Sölle sees such a separation as "blessing a false praxis."¹⁶ Service and action are necessary parts of the Church's work in the world: "But what kind of love would it be which in such repeated assertions [of God's love] trickled down from heaven without any concern for the real situation of the recipients?"¹⁷ Sölle sees this as a false love; the proclamation of God's love has to be accompanied by active participation in God's love to all humanity.¹⁸

Theodicy and Justice

Not surprisingly, Moltmann draws his theology of justice from the experiences of Auschwitz and sees "the question about God [as being] identical with the cry of the victims of justice and the hunger of the perpetrators for a way back from the path of

¹³ Dorothee Sölle. *Political theology*. Translated by John Shelley. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 107

¹⁴ Dorothee Sölle. *The silent cry: Mysticism and resistance*. Translated by Barbara Rumscheidt and Martin Rumscheidt. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 87

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 79

¹⁶ Rumscheidt, "A calling in a higher sense: The poetics of Dorothee Sölle," p. 84

¹⁷ Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 145

¹⁸ Sölle. *Silent cry*, p. 93

death.”¹⁹ This dual philosophy of justice not only acknowledges Moltmann’s position as a German after WORLD WAR II, but also his position of privilege as a white, male, educated person, a privilege which he acknowledges himself.²⁰ This interest in theodicy and justice was developed in his early work with Moltmann being one of the first theologians to study the writings of Bonhoeffer, which Bauckham suggests was a critical influence on his social ethic.²¹

As such, justice for Moltmann is the work against the suffering experienced in the world and in order not to turn concepts such as hope and resurrection into other-worldly affairs, he emphasises the notion that justice must be imbedded into any theology of suffering. Indeed, he sees the cross as committing Christians “to solidarity especially with the most hopeless of humanity.”²² The basic affirmation of equal rights for all human beings is central to Moltmann’s theology of suffering and hope.²³ Further to this, he argues that hope is “always bound with a criticism of the present.”²⁴ It seeks to reform history, the need for which is identified in this criticism. He argues that God is seeking a world wherein all people are accepted and have what they need for survival.²⁵

It is this meeting of people’s needs which Moltmann sees as critical to God’s vision of justice. He suggests that God’s justice is different from the human concept of “Justitia with bandaged eyes, who judges without respect of person.”²⁶ Rather God has particular concern for the oppressed and brings both justice for the victims and a new beginning for the perpetrators.²⁷ In many ways Moltmann sees that God treats people

¹⁹ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. ix

²⁰ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 231

²¹ Richard Bauckham. *The theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), p. 2

²² Ibid., p. 112

²³ Jürgen Moltmann. *God for a secular society: The public relevance of theology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) p. 21

²⁴ Jürgen Moltmann. *Hope and planning*. Translated by M Clarkson. (London: S.C.M. Press, 1971), p. 18

²⁵ Moltmann. *The Spirit of life*, p. 129

²⁶ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 61

²⁷ Ibid.

according to their situation rather than by a pre-defined formula. In this way, God's justice is inherently political in that it challenges the status quo.

In arguing for a theology of human rights and justice, Moltmann refers to having been critiqued by those who would argue that theology and politics should be separated. Moltmann counters this by arguing that those who advocate for such a separation could equally be defending the status quo.²⁸ Like Sölle, he suggests that inaction on an issue of justice is support for the injustice. More specifically, to suggest that theology should not have political implications is to suggest that the current situation is right in God's eyes. He sees an integral connection between "God's 'justifying' righteousness and his righteousness that 'creates justice'."²⁹ That is, because God is primarily righteous, this concern for right relationships between people should then overflow into the relationships made by Christians. Moltmann therefore sees justice as being an issue at the heart of the Christian faith, though he acknowledges that it is because of the seeming split between law and grace in the Old and New Testaments that this focus on justice has not been maintained.³⁰ I have encountered Christians who read Paul's justification by grace alone as countering the need to engage in the works of justice as is advocated in the Old Testament.

In arguing for the need for justice, Moltmann also criticises the aid programmes that feed the hungry without also critiquing systems which created the hunger in the first place.³¹ Such an approach has a short term benefit at best. Justice is more than a simple redistribution of wealth for such a redistribution is temporary if the systems which created such imbalance are not changed. It does not address the root cause of the problem and hence allows for the injustice to resume once a crisis has passed. A

²⁸ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 292

²⁹ Moltmann. *The Spirit of life*, p. 129

³⁰ Ibid., p. 129

³¹ Jürgen Moltmann. *Religion, revolution, and the future*. Translated by Douglas Meeks. (New York: Scribner, 1969), p. 39

concern for justice is integral to Moltmann's theology and this is not just a theoretical concern, but rather a call to action to change unjust situations.

Living Differently

Justice was also a concern of the advocates in their dealing with the refugees and asylum seekers. However, because of the situation in which they found themselves, it had to go beyond a mere call to justice through words or action. This action against the unjust system developed by the Australian government is one clear example of subverting the system. Advocates had to work within and against a system that imposed suffering on other people. In response to the inhumanity of the system which detained asylum seekers, those who supported the latter engaged in a variety of means to subvert the system and to maintain their personal integrity in the face of the inhumanity inflicted on the detainees. One supporter reflected:

I guess we live in a human world where we are not perfect and awful things happen all the time. And the system was very cruel and sadly, we are part of that system. So I guess in the Circles of Friends³² we are given the opportunity to be outside of that system, to say, "No, we are not part of that system."
[Joyce]

The ways in which people said "no" to the system were varied and often depended on where they were supporting the refugees and asylum seekers. Even after release from detention, the refugees faced a system that discriminated against them and advocates were still involved in agitating to enable the observation of basic human rights. Barbara, who helped refugees after they were released on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), said:

We enrolled the children who were of primary school age. I took them and enrolled them and that was also against [what was permitted by the government] because they weren't supposed to be enrolled.

³²The Circles of Friends were groups set up around Adelaide to support refugees and asylum seekers. As an organisation it also assisted in some of the practical issues of such groups, for example with maintaining funds for the work so the groups themselves could focus on the support that the refugees and asylum seekers required.

This concern with working against the injustices of the system set up by the government not only related to those who were on TPVs, but also to those in detention. When the government attempted to isolate asylum seekers by incarcerating them, the churches worked to bring compassion and support to those affected in order to alleviate the suffering experienced. When the government sought to dehumanise the asylum seekers through the media,³³ the relationships already established with asylum seekers meant that people in the churches could tell a different story. Thus the churches developed a very deliberate strategy to work against the inhumanity of the government. Rev'd Joe pointed out:

The government had discovered to their horror that no matter where they put these detention centres, they found the church is already there. The church being the broad church and that was very true.

Thus wherever the government located the detention centres, there was at least a small group of people present who were willing to actively support the asylum seekers.

For those who visited the detention centres, the subversion was both in their practical actions and in their treatment of the detainees. Rev'd Susan recollected a time of sharing with some of the young men whom she had known in a previous detention centre:

I remember sitting in the visitors' centre in the Baxter detention centre and I had about half a dozen of the guys sitting there with me talking about the good old days at the Port Hedland detention centre. It was so wonderful in comparison to detention here. So they were having lots of laughs about remember what we did, remember this, we wouldn't be able to do that and you know. Lots of conversations.

Laughing in a place of inhumanity is subversion in itself, as it does not allow those who run the system to have the final word; however, this was not the only way in which people were able to work to counter the system. Others made use of the conditions to

³³ As noted by David Marr and Marian Wilkinson. *Dark victory*. (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), p. 135

create a more humane environment. Rev'd Janice spoke of how the only place for women to breastfeed in the visitors' centre was in a cupboard, so she used the privacy of the cupboard to pass on essential items for the mother and baby that would otherwise have had to go through the property store.

However, it was not only the visitors and detainees that worked against the inhumanity present. On occasions there were guards who did the same. Elizabeth related phoning a friend who was in hospital after a hunger strike and hearing that he had finally decided to eat again. In her joy, she said to him:

I said, "If I was there, I would give you a hug." And he said, "What is hug?" And I said, "I put my arms around you and hold you very close." And he said, "I not understand." And I said, "Give me to Wayne. [The detention centre guard]. Wayne, can you show him or explain to him what a hug is." And he said, "Give me a minute." And the next minute I could hear all this hilarity and another guard got on the phone and said, "What did you ask Wayne to do?" and I said, "I asked him to give Mahmud a hug." And he said, "I've never seen anything so funny."

Thus the guard, Wayne, treated Mahmud with a sense of humanity, not only by explaining the English language, but also by crossing his own cultural barriers in order to bring a sense of comfort and celebration.

Working against systemic injustices was seen by many advocates as the Christian response to such inhumanity. Rev'd Robert reflected:

The other thing too that I think, that it was countercultural. And that I think is inherent in the Christian faith but we haven't realised yet really that you don't realise how culturally conditioned we are.

An awareness of that cultural conditioning is the first step towards working against the injustices that are present in our contemporary social life. Advocates questioned what was being told to them by the government and as they got to know the detainees and refugees personally they developed a better understanding of why the system needed

changing. Another advocate found his faith changed when a detention centre came to near where he lived. He said:

We were challenged in all the things we were reading in Bible studies and discussion but all on paper about loving your neighbour and someone who is less fortunate when suddenly it was thrown in your face and it was a bit challenging given the sort of environment created by statements from the highest in the land that this was nothing for ordinary Australians to concern themselves about. [George]

As George found, faith became something which was no longer a Sunday job but rather a way of life responding to injustice in society. For some advocates, taking Christianity out of the churches was a new experience. Others had previously been engaging in God's work in the community and this in turn had brought them into contact with refugees and asylum seekers. Indeed, the support of refugees and asylum seekers was seen as not only being about faith, but also about the way that God acts in the world, hence a way to be imitated by Christians. As Rev'd Kathleen noted:

I would say that God is calling attention to it and subverting it. So the magnificat: The rich shall go away empty and the poor will be filled with good things. The whole beatitudes of turning everything upside-down. That's where I see God at work in the world through people.

It can therefore be said that because God works to subvert the injustices inflicted by some humans on others, so too Christians are called to subvert systems of inhumanity.

Resilience in the face of injustice

In many ways, it was the resilience of the asylum seekers in their situations which gave strength to those who were visiting and supporting them. This could be experienced in many different ways including the stories of what happened before arriving in Australia as well as by seeing how asylum seekers coped with immigration detention. Many advocates related that their asylum seeker and refugee friends had been intimidated and tortured before escaping to Australia. One advocate related:

I found, I think, that the human spirit has almost unfathomable limits. I think of what I did, and I think what some of the others would have done, quite a number

of times when we saw illustrations. We never saw the guards brutalising them or anything like that. If we realised or if they shared with us something where for instance all their rights were taken away from them for 10 days or whatever it was, you saw a determination that they were not going to be beaten and that helped us to think something like this: if they can stand up in that time, we need to. What have we got to complain about? [Larry]

Hearing the stories of the inhumanity inflicted on their friends helped advocates to put their own problems into perspective and in doing so to cope better with their own difficulties. At the same time, those in the detention centres used a variety of means to maintain their hope within the despair of the detention centres; however, this was often difficult. Yet in spite of their own difficult circumstances, asylum seekers were able to care for those who visited them and often this was one of the few things they could give back to advocates. One advocate related how one of the detainees she visited would offer her support and care during her times of troubles.

I can remember when stuff was happening in my personal life and which all seemed very trivial compared to people in detention. I remember I had been in a relationship. This boyfriend and I had gone to Villawood together for about a year and so he was well known with the refugee friends as well. They were friends with him and they were very important to him as well and it was something that we shared, although I'd visited before I started dating this person. And then we broke up and I was devastated and remember going the next time I went to Villawood and Shayub asking me about that and then telling me I understand how you feel and he told some stories that was like so much worse, because it was also in the context of "I loved a Christian Palestinian and the family threatened to kill us" and it was so much worse, but and just like so I guess in situations like that I saw that strength is not the same as strength. [Virginia]

This episode not only put her experiences into perspective, but also Virginia reflected on the compassion which brings resilience through connections with other people. This was also part of the need to experience care in order to maintain personal strength which was another recurring theme. Some of the supporters found themselves in situations where the stress was on-going, with few times of respite. Rev'd Janice said she had to learn resilience:

It's a bit like you love God; you love your neighbour *as you love yourself*. So to

the degree that I can love myself in the right way, only then is that to be the right way to love the world and so on. Otherwise if I'm always giving, giving, giving, giving out to everyone else, otherwise I start to be resentful, not just a little bit, but a big bit resentful, that after all I've done I deserve better than this, so feeling sorry for myself, sort of thing.

In this way she found a new sense of internal strength to deal with her situations. Because of the difficulties encountered by asylum seekers, the need for hope was imperative but was not always present. This taught advocates a sense of determination that not all of them previously had. Even those who had a persistent character before their work with asylum seekers, found that they needed this more than they previously had. One advocate reflected:

I think there were times when this theme of hope and suffering; there were times I think what I've learnt is to hang on there and hang on and hang on and hang on. Because there were times when their situation was just so desperate that you could not, could not see any way out at all. [Rev'd Susan]

Another said:

I think the most powerful time was praying with the men in Baxter itself. Just being with them and experiencing their pain, really. Or that was hoping for better things together. Just the hope that was still to be there, *had* to be there, otherwise they would have cracked. [Michael]

Thus, although little hope was there to be found, asylum seeker and their supporters were able to maintain a glimmer of hope despite the suffering that was experienced. Although the difficulties experienced in immigration detention were severe, there was still a determination to continue on in order to have a safe life. It was this resilience demonstrated by the refugees and asylum seekers which gave advocates the strength to continue their work although much of the broader society at the time was disparaging of supporting asylum seekers.

Determination to be different

In the end, it was determination which enabled asylum seekers to survive being in immigration detention and this determination was helped by the presence of their

supporters. That they had the personal strength to come to Australia in the first place was often seen by their supporters as a sign of their potential. Linda commented:

Imagine selling your TV and all your furniture and your car and you know, just sell everything you've got to get the money because you have to leave or else you die.

Yet, in spite of the inner resources which asylum seekers already had, in the detention centre environment more support was needed in order to keep going until a visa was granted. Another advocate related:

And we know that if the next answer is "no", then the next thing is an appeal to the minister and we look at which politicians to get to join in. And he maintains that the only thing I've ever said with real consistency is that you cannot give up because if you give up, they win. And so my bottom line in hope is: how do you find the energy not to give up? [Ron]

This persistence was central to asylum seekers surviving in immigration detention. Indeed, it was seeing such suffering in the detention centres and the effect this was having on the detainees which helped give advocates the energy not to give up. For many advocates there was a focus on not letting the system grind them down or beat them. One regular visitor reflected:

I was absolutely buggered some times and exhausted and sick of it and all that. But I'm boof-headed and dogged and I knew that once I'd started I was in it for the long haul. So the day I decided to take on Baxter it became a priority for me, not the only priority. [Rev'd Joe]

Rev'd Joe had some unique experiences of the inhumanity of the detention centres, including being caught up in a lockdown of the centre. In spite of the trauma of these experiences, he was determined to continue in his work with asylum seekers. Some advocates reflected on the inability to give up and its connections to the life of Jesus. The fact that Jesus continued his ministry in spite of the opposition and having few opportunities for personal time gave some advocates the strength to keep going. Martha related:

I only have to read anything about Jesus' life, while there were some moments of great glory for him, they weren't the things that he necessarily welcomed such as the adoration. They need you; they need to see you and so on.

For others, it was the sense of being called by God to work with asylum seekers which helped them continue. The conviction that this was the place where God wanted them to be gave some advocates strength they did not know they possessed. Rev'd Joe, who lived near a detention centre related:

At one stage in the interview he said, "How did you people come to be, what drew you to [the detention centre]?" And I think he was indicating that we were the rent-a-crowd type social justice people. And some people did move to the areas because they felt it was their call. And it was the first time it dawned on me in the sense that I didn't go looking for it, it landed on my doorstep, so I guess it was an invitation from God to decide for and take a stand.

Living in a way that was supportive and accepting of the refugees and asylum seekers was not only part of the advocates' personal values. It was also integral to the ways in which they felt they needed to live out the Gospel and hence was very much part of their faith system. It was also their faith that gave them the strength to continue even when it meant their life was difficult.

Countercultural action

One of the important concepts which advocates raised in terms of suffering is that of the need to live and act in countercultural ways and to subvert the unjust systems which are put in place in society's name. Although Moltmann writes of the need to enact justice and the reign of God, as has already been noted this occurs so sparingly that it is possible to miss it altogether as other authors have done.³⁴ Sölle, on the other hand, does affirm more explicitly the need for action, but she does not connect this need to either suffering or hope. It implies that for Sölle thinking, action and suffering are removed from each other; however I do not believe this to be her view. Advocates, as

³⁴ Macquarrie, "Today's word," p. 4

we have seen were more emphatic in their connection between their faith and working against unjust systems.

This subversion of the system is not only a personal response to the suffering of others, but, as advocates frequently pointed out, also a biblical response. Advocates drew in particular on the gospel stories of Jesus working against an unjust system, not only to justify their work with asylum seekers and refugees, but also in reflecting on what gave them hope:

Well, I guess if you stick to the New Testament, most of the stories there were about hope, weren't they. They were about Jesus liberating people who sometimes had no hope. The man with the demons. The woman with the menstrual problem, with the continual flow of blood. The people who were sick. The prostitutes. You see that Jesus brought hope to their lives because he said you need not be marginalised. You need not be on the edges of society in God's kingdom. You will go ahead of those who are supposedly righteous. [Rev'd Lyn]

It was the fact that Jesus enacted out the reign of God by including those whom society saw as outcasts which provided a theological rationale for advocates to do the same. If Christians are called to be followers of Christ, then the life of Jesus is central to that calling as the model on which the Christian life is based. Based on the radical inclusion shown by Jesus, where the structures of society are unjust or discriminate against particular groups within the society then alternative action becomes the Christian response. Advocates are not alone in viewing justice as the Christian response to suffering: this same gospel imperative is the focus of the work of the liberation theologians and other contemporary voices. Sobrino sees justice as being “the quintessence of Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom”³⁵ Working for justice is an essential part of the Christian response to the inhumanity of the world.

³⁵ Jon Sobrino. *Christology at the crossroads: A Latin American approach*. Translated by John Drury. (London: SCM Press, 1978), p. 120

Advocates expressed this Christian response to injustice much more strongly than either Moltmann or Sölle have done, which illustrates the need to make a stronger connection between theology and praxis. This connection has already been suggested by the Liberation theologians, such as Sobrino and Boff.^{36,37} Praxis cannot be separated from its theological basis otherwise a separation occurs between popular theology and social action. For Boff, the Church's reaction to the suffering ones of the world is the measure of Christianity's credibility.³⁸ The theological critique of systems as recorded by the Hebrew prophets is increasingly being reclaimed by churches today. However little is written from an academic perspective about this prophetic call to justice and nor is it connected to suffering and hope.³⁹

One may ask if this connection between praxis and theologies of suffering and hope is necessary. However without such a connection, theology remains as something that is relevant for the middle-class rather than being a hope for the poor and marginalised of the world. It also is in danger of stagnating as a theoretical concept not requiring any change through actions from Christians. Without connecting praxis and theology of suffering, justice is turned into charity that is done *to* other people, rather than those needing justice becoming *a subject of* God's love in their own right. This may sound like pure semantics, but "justice" as charity creates the danger of treating people as objects and ultimately as objects to fill one's own needs. Viewing others as the subject of God's love calls for a change in the ways in which they are treated in that it advocates for the treatment of people with loving kindness. It also empowers people to take their own control rather than continuing to rely on acts of charity of other people.

³⁶ Jon Sobrino. *The principle of mercy: Taking the crucified people from the Cross*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 15

³⁷ Leonardo Boff and Virgilio P. Elizondo. *Convergences and differences*. Translated by James Aitken Gardiner. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), p. xiv

³⁸ Leonardo Boff. *When theology listens to the poor*. Translated by Robert R Barr. 1st Harper & Row ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. x

³⁹ A search of the Proquest database revealed only 21 articles with the subjects of theology and justice.

Such acts of charity inflicted on others actually work to maintain the status quo, rather than helping to create a changed society where everyone has sufficient for their daily needs to be met. Justice needs to involve both the alleviation of suffering in the short term as well as working to counter the situation that created the need in the first place.

The actions of Jesus and the proclamations of the prophets both demonstrated that the poor and marginalised are the beloved of God and need to be acknowledged as such. It is the recognition of the marginalised as being in the centre of God's concern that enables a changed attitude. As Sobrino points out, "to resemble Jesus is to reproduce the structure of his life... taking on the sin of the world, and not just standing by idly by looking at it from the outside."⁴⁰ It is, of course, necessary to question whether this theology could be used to support actions which are technically illegal, but are done in order to recognise the humanity of oppressed people, for example, in Rev'd Janice's earlier story of smuggling necessities to the women who had to breastfeed in a broom cupboard. Sometimes this level of action is necessary in order to stand in solidarity with those who are victimised and dehumanised was necessary. In the gospel accounts, we see Jesus interacting with unclean people against the rules of his religion. His actions also challenged religious and political oppression. What difference does it make that these interactions were against the rules of the country? I would argue there is little difference.

Living in a countercultural way in the face of oppression of others has a clear biblical mandate in the life of Jesus and, if we explored the issue further, often in the lives of the prophets.⁴¹ There are obviously times when prophetic action is necessary in order to demonstrate a different way of being. Churches cannot stand by and watch the suffering of others simply because of limitations placed upon them by external

⁴⁰ Sobrino. *Principle of mercy*, p. 15

⁴¹ For example as expressed in Luke 6:20-38

authorities. This is a call not only to promoting justice but also to subverting systems of injustice regardless of the source of that injustice.

Outlook

Why don't they want me?
The little child asked
As she stared into the desert
Framed by razor wire?

Why don't they want me?
She cried to the night
As the torch light shone
Counting people like sheep

Why don't they want you?
I cried with the child,
Holding her,
Rocking her
Loving her.

Why don't they want me
Those men in grey suits
In their big city offices
With desks covered in paper?

Why don't they want me
The people on the street
Who can't see the pain
Of a crying child?

You hold up a mirror, my love,
I said
And show their potential
To be human:
To feel compassion
And pain

-EL

Easter Saturday

Introduction

What does the concept of the resurrection mean to those who have lost all hope? For those who stood by the cross on Good Friday watching their friend being slowly tortured to death, there was no likely hope. Asylum seekers in the detention centres, who saw their hope being systematically stripped away by the government, surely must have had a similar experience.

Easter as a metaphor has been used by Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates to express the idea of the new life that can develop out of suffering. Whilst Moltmann and Sölle connect this to suffering, advocates spoke of resurrection in relation to the hope which they encountered. Indeed, it was only really when asylum seekers were released from detention that this theme came strongly through in the advocates' reflections.

This chapter will explore the various ways in which the Easter story has been used to speak of suffering and hope. Reflections on Good Friday and Easter Sunday are important to our theology, but so too is the time of mournful waiting of Easter Saturday. This latter concept is important; the lack of reflecting on resurrection in relation to detention reminds us of the need for remembering the darkness of Easter Saturday.

Moltmann's own Resurrection

Moltmann's theology of suffering has a strong focus on the resurrection as a symbol of transformation. It appears as a hopeful theology and therefore one could argue that it should be discussed in the section on hope, but Moltmann himself strongly connects it to suffering. In many ways, it is the concept of resurrection which makes suffering

bearable, though not by negating the experience. This connection for Moltmann can be illustrated by a quotation from his autobiography:

We saw the pits in which more than 10,000 people had been shot on a single day. At the time I wanted to sink into the ground for shame, and would have suffocated in the presence of mass murder, if on one of the roads through the camp I have not suddenly had a vision. I looked into the world of the resurrection and saw all these dead men, women, and children coming towards me. Since then I have known that God's history with Auschwitz and Maidanek has not been broken off, but that it goes further with victims and with the perpetrators. Without hope for this "new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3.13), this earth, which has suffered Treblinka and Maidanek, would be unendurable.¹

In the light of his experiences as a German soldier in World War II, the overwhelming suffering that was inflicted at Auschwitz, Treblinka and Maidanek would have been overwhelming if it had not also been accompanied by the hope of the Resurrection. It does not negate the suffering inflicted, but rather offers a different perspective.

Resurrection promises a new future and, as Bauckham emphasises, Moltmann sees the resurrection as relating to a future "*for this world.*"² Rather than resurrection being a concept for the hereafter, the effects of the resurrection must be felt in the current world. Moltmann suggests that without resurrection, Christ's suffering on the cross "is reduced to a theology of satisfaction,"³ which sees Jesus as the sacrificial victim. By focusing on the resurrection rather than only the crucifixion, the sacrifice is not the end point rather it is the beginning of something new. Instead of sacrifice, Moltmann's concept of resurrection allows for the transformation of suffering for both victims and perpetrators, by becoming the "energy for a rebirth of this life,"⁴ which in turn enables the continued

¹ Jürgen Moltmann. *A broad place: An autobiography*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 84

² Richard Bauckham. *The theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), p. 35

³ Jürgen Moltmann. *In the end, the beginning: The life of hope*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 55

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89

struggle against the suffering in the world. Resurrection therefore becomes a “creative act of God”⁵ and a protest against the suffering of the world.⁶

Grace, and hence resurrection, has in contemporary times tended to lead to an individualised view of Christianity, a view which Moltmann refutes. Moltmann does not see resurrection as relating to the “salvation of the soul, [that is] individual rescue from the evil world,”⁷ but rather as the “realisation of the eschatological *hope of justice*.”⁸ Therefore grace is not rescue or escapism, but rather a call to engage more fully with the world in order to work for justice and freedom from oppression. Resurrection occurs where the hope of justice is expressed and the reign of God is anticipated in the here and now. The concepts of grace and resurrection cannot be separated from the cross, with the latter representing the suffering of the world.⁹ Thus Moltmann argues neither grace nor resurrection can be separated from work to change the situation for those who are living in suffering.

Incarnation and suffering

Sölle, rather than writing about resurrection, focuses instead on the incarnation and what this means for humanity. It will be briefly discussed in this chapter because of her focus on the identification of Christ with suffering humanity. Yet further discussions about what Sölle says about God incarnate will be found in chapter 13 (The suffering God). Some aspects of her Christology are worth exploring here because they refer to God’s presence in suffering. Primarily, Sölle sees Christ as being the face of one who has suffered:

⁵ Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology in the coming of God," in *God will be all in all: The eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 6

⁶ Vincent J. Genovesi. *Expectant creativity: The action of hope in Christian ethics*. (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), p. 86

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann. *Theology of hope: On the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*. Translated by James W. Leitch. 5th ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967) p. 329

⁸ Ibid., p. 329 emphasis in original

⁹ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 101

There was the face of a man, tortured to death 2,000 years ago, who did not choose nihilism. Actually, it was Christ who got me into theology, Christ who forced me to ask the question, Can one really claim that all that matters is love?¹⁰

Being drawn to theology in such a manner, it is hardly surprising that Christology is central to Sölle's early theology. Indeed, she reflects that in the wake of the Second World War, the concept of God had little meaning to her and Christ was initially the important figure.¹¹ Oliver suggests that for Sölle "in a world so fully secularised ... the only way it knows to speak of God is to speak of God's demise, [therefore] an image of Christ must address the driving questions of the day."¹² According to Oliver, it is because of this starting philosophy that Sölle develops her theology of Christ as the representative. This image of Christ not only is about representing God to humanity, but also humanity to God.¹³ In this way, Sölle's initial view of God being removed from the world is reconciled with the need for God to engage in the suffering of the world. It was only later that Sölle began to see the relatedness of God the creator to the world of suffering.¹⁴

However, Sölle does not just see Christ's crucifixion as a once-off event in the depths of history, for in the infliction of suffering on the poor and marginalised, Sölle sees that "Christ is crucified today and that you can't develop any piety outside of all of this and independent of all of this, keeping yourself clean from reality."¹⁵ As such, she argues that the crucifixion was not "a sadomasochistic transaction between himself and an all-

¹⁰ Dorothee Sölle. *Against the wind: Memoir of a radical Christian*. Translated by Barbara Rumscheidt and Martin Rumscheidt. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 20

¹¹ Ibid., p. 34

¹² Dianne L. Oliver, "Christ in the world: The christological vision of Dorothee Sölle," in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 110

¹³ Dorothee Sölle. *Christ the representative: An essay in theology after the 'Death of God'*. Translated by David Lewis. (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 130

¹⁴ Such as in Sölle. *Silent cry*, p. 138

¹⁵ Beyers Naudé and Dorothee Sölle. *Hope for faith: A conversation*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), p. 16

powerful God to pay for sins,”¹⁶ but rather it was because those in authority would not listen to his message. With this interpretation, the resurrection “means they did not succeed in silencing him.”¹⁷ Hence for Sölle, to talk about Christ without talking about the ways in which Christ is still being crucified in the world today means nothing.¹⁸ This links Christ with the victims of oppression as well as with those who would work to counter that victimisation. The two concepts of Christ and justice are intimately connected:

Instead Jesus identified with the suffering and for the sake of their sickness became sick; for the sufferers’ sake he suffered abuse; in order to overcome death he, like everyone else, became mortal. To accept the way of Jesus means also to hold onto the paradox.¹⁹

Therefore, in order to follow the way of Jesus Christ, Sölle sees that Christians must identify with the poor, the marginalised and the suffering ones of this world. She highlights this quoting from a mass from Nicaragua. Jesus is the:

God who sweats on the street, the God with the sunburnt face, he looks and feels as we do, the *Christo trabajador* [Christ worker], Christ the worker.²⁰

Thus for Sölle, the correct response for Christians who live in the affluent western world towards the suffering of Christ seen in the suffering of others is to take action. In this way, the western Christian chooses suffering as an action of solidarity and alleviation.

Towards a new life

In contrast to the writing of Moltmann and Sölle, advocates spoke little of the resurrection experience, although this image featured in their theological reflections.

¹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The feminist liberation theology of Dorothee Sölle," in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 214

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dorothee Sölle. *Suffering*. Translated by Everett R. Kalin. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), p. 142

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 166

²⁰ Dorothee Sölle. *Thinking about God: An introduction to theology*. Translated by John Bowden. (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 114

Those who did tended to be the advocates who focused on helping refugees who had been released from detention rather than those who visited the centres and they connected it with hope rather than with suffering. This sense of new life, and its connection to hope, was put succinctly by one advocate:

I would define it [hope] as it's a brand new day. Every day you get up, it's a brand new day. So that's hope. [Rev'd Helen]

Quite a few refugee families had babies once they were released from detention. Not only was this was a tangible sign of hope in the new life of a child, but also it showed the hope that life was stable enough for the family to have the new child.

I felt sorry for them, but they've got a new life here. Most of the women have had new babies since they've been here. [Mary]

Hope always comes with babies, I think, and new life. So something of the, about new life, opportunities, God opening up the way. That time and time again our situations can be transformed by new possibilities, I suppose, that we perhaps don't expect. Babies are such an obvious example of that, you know life, bringing new life and hope into the world. [Janet]

The reflection on being able to start over was also part of the biblical reflection in which advocates engaged. For James, the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) was of particular importance when reflecting on hope and the potential to start over again:

And that image to me is sort of what Christianity is all about; it is accepting and the father could have done and said so much to the son, but he didn't and I'm not taking it as a literal story, but it sort of represents what the teachings of Jesus was all about – that open your arms and accept people as they are and don't pass judgement on them and show them love by doing, that the best will come of any situation

Thus, the experience of new beginnings was extended into action with the suffering people in the world; in this case the refugees on temporary protection visas. However, for those advocates who supported asylum seekers in detention, the experience was very different.

Many advocates who visited the detention centres drew on images of the crucifixion to describe the pain and suffering that occurred there. It is worth noting at this point that

advocates were not asked for biblical images of their experiences of despair, but only of hope. That they offered the crucifixion as a way of speaking about what was happening to the people in detention was therefore all the more significant.

Rev'd Walter spoke of the detention centres as being a way that Australia was "crucifying people"; a theme that was also developed by others. For Marilyn, who was a university student at the time of supporting asylum seekers and refugees, the imagery of the crucifixion and Eucharist gave a physical expression to God's engagement in the world. It was a tangible symbol of meeting God in the world rather than only in spiritual endeavours in the church.

Others found that the celebration of Easter itself took on new meaning when they experienced it with asylum seekers in the detention centres. Virginia, a young adult, related:

One of the most powerful Eucharists I'd ever been to at the time was in Villawood at Easter. It would have been one of the first times, it might have even been the first time. We went there before we started visiting, I can't remember. I don't even remember it that well now, but just at the time, I think, it seemed a lot more meaningful to be celebrating Easter in places of genuine suffering. And other stuff was happening at the time as well. In terms of the people, I was hanging out with and information I was getting and stuff that made me more and more cynical in those terms, to see Jesus as a refugee, political prisoner who died under capital punishment.

Denise agreed, saying:

And certainly it brought Easter very much, made the meaning of Easter probably for me, Jesus suffering. I thought of those people suffering and they really suffered. Terrible pain. You saw it in them didn't you?

Similarly, Rev'd Susan, who was a chaplain to a detention centre, saw the events leading up to Easter, not only the crucifixion, as resonating.

The whole Good Friday, the whole crucifixion really resonates. All the stuff of being betrayed by friends, lies told about you in court, false witness being given, being wrongly accused. Suffering, you know the whole story of the cross and the crucifixion really resonated and they were really able to say look, everything that you guys have been through, Jesus has been there as well and is with you.

Advocates who did not speak of the crucifixion did reflect on their experiences of helplessness, which suggests that had they been asked about biblical stories that spoke in their difficulties, the crucifixion would have featured even more prominently. The sense of helplessness was explored by the majority of the advocates who had visited the detention centres, and with good reason. The detention centres were:

...Very intimidating. It was just a horrible place, just felt, well it was a prison and a high security prison. And you think what a depressing and oppressive situation for people to come into when they'd been escaping their own, when they'd been escaping from their homeland. It was very cruel. High razor wire and big no-go zones after you got through the fences. Very intimidating, you got patted down every time you walked through. Couldn't, had to go through past another guard and into the main building. Then you met the people, they were called to come to you and of course you didn't always see the people you were expecting to because they were depressed and didn't want to come out. So it required a bit of them as well. They had to, to want to talk to, want to meet somebody. [Charles]

This intimidation created a feeling of helplessness and stripped, from even the most empowered advocates, their ability to create changes in the situation. Like the asylum seekers, advocates were completely powerless to make a significant difference into the situation and, as has already been noted in previous chapters, most of what they could offer asylum seekers was relationship and solidarity. This suggests that for those who are engaged in the depths of suffering, looking to the resurrection as a sign of the future hope is not enough. I am arguing that Moltmann's theology of resurrection as transformation had little meaning in the situation of the detention centres. Sölle's concept of incarnation as God engaging in the suffering world has some connection to the reflection of advocates, but I would suggest that something further is needed in order to bridge the gap between their theologies and the experiences of those who visited the immigration detention centres. My reflections on the views of advocates' focus on the suffering and Moltmann's focus on the resurrection lead me to the image of Easter Saturday.

Towards the Resurrection

Given that resurrection and the Easter story only occasionally appeared in advocates' reflections on suffering, the question is raised as to how these images can be used to explore the notion of where hope is found in suffering without hope becoming trite. Certainly, it seems that Moltmann's tendency towards seeing the resurrection as a metaphor for transformation in suffering does not relate to advocates' reflections. Rather, because of the depth of suffering experienced in detention, the use of the resurrection metaphor among advocates did not start to have relevance until the hopes of freedom were realised. This, to me, suggests the need to develop a focus not only on the resurrection, but also on Easter Saturday.

I would suggest that Moltmann's focus on the resurrection skims over the pain of Easter Saturday and whilst it is important as Christians to look towards the resurrection, this should not diminish the darkness of the Saturday. After all, the first followers of Christ did not know what subsequent events would occur. It is this uncertainty that makes the pain and despair all the more present, and yet it can, at the same time, give hope as there is still the possibility of something new occurring.

However, when asked about biblical stories that had particular meaning, it was the crucifixion which was one of the commonly recurring motifs, since it connected many of the elements of suffering which asylum seekers and their friends experienced.

Well, definitely the crucifixion, you couldn't really get much more um suffering that... well if Jesus had to go through that then it must be necessary for humans to go through it as well. But to varying degrees and different so you know it's very powerful the crucifixion I think and the sign of the cross for that knowing how much Jesus suffered... Jesus could've done so much more if he hadn't have been crucified. But it wasn't to be, we had to fuck it up didn't we. [Sandra]

Sölle, with her focus on seeing Christ in the poor and hurting, would agree with this view. Christ too was crucified in the mistreatment and torture of asylum seekers in detention.

Like Jesus in the Easter story, asylum seekers had been betrayed and denied by those who they thought were friends; some had been tortured and threatened with death; the major difference being that they had been the ones able to escape from the potential death. However, an important consideration in using the Easter story as a metaphor for movement through suffering is that the resurrection does not occur in the midst of the suffering or even immediately after its conclusion; resurrection only occurs after the darkness of Easter Saturday.

Easter Saturday reminds that there is a need to allow time to grieve rather than to expect instant changes in the life situation even after suffering has been removed. In many ways, it is a time of helpless waiting: the old has already passed away, but nothing new has arrived. Because of this, it is an empty time where the future is uncertain and cannot yet be anticipated. As Rev'd Joan related:

Because for many, many reasons, feeling inadequate, feeling helpless because really what most of the people want is just a life, just to be able to get on with life in a peaceful manner. Just get their lives back and get on with their lives, young men want to marry and have families and have a job or a business, just what normal life is meant to be or in their eyes. And here they are locked up for 5 years of the, at a time in their lives when they would really be getting their lives together for the future.

Even the expectation of something new could hardly be acknowledged in the detention centres. To draw on the stages of grief, as first defined by Kubler-Ross,²¹ Easter Saturday is the time of depression, anger and bargaining. It is when the enormity of the situation has become apparent, but the possibilities have not yet started to take shape. New life cannot be rushed into from the pain of past events, but rather needs time for people to grieve before healing can start to take place.

²¹ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. *On death and dying*. 1st Scribner Classics ed. (New York: Scribner Classics, 1997)

As Lewis reminds us, Easter Saturday is not an empty day, but is rather the day in which Christ “descended into hell.”²² Therefore the pain of Easter Saturday is not a hiatus in the story, but rather is an integral part of the healing process. However as far as the disciples were concerned, on Easter Saturday, Jesus “had simply died, and his cause died with him, quite falsified and finished.”²³ For those disciples there was no knowledge of the cosmic battle of the descent into hell, but rather Easter Saturday held their own internal battle that said all their hopes were over.

Remembering the waiting of Easter Saturday is one way that the space of waiting can be maintained in situations of despair and hopelessness. This is hopefully not a new revelation, although for some it is useful as a theological reminder.²⁴ For those who need it, the concept of Easter Saturday provides a theological justification for allowing a time of grief and waiting before experiencing the resurrection that occurs after suffering. It enables one to hold both the severity of past suffering and to acknowledge the future resurrection and new life at a time when believing in the new life is difficult.

Although Easter Saturday is a day of unknown waiting that must also be honoured, it is also a transitional day. Looking towards the resurrection is a sign of hope that Christian theology maintains in even the darkest times. What is said about hope must also respect the darkness of the rest of the Easter story, for without the incarnation and crucifixion, the resurrection is a magical and mythical tale. The next section of this thesis will explore three elements that must be integral to our contemporary concepts of Christian hope. However, first the question must be addressed as to whether we, as an affluent Western society can possibly speak about hope in the face of the suffering that is inflicted in marginalised communities around the world.

²² Alan E. Lewis. *Between cross and Resurrection: A theology of Holy Saturday*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 37

²³ Ibid., p. 45

²⁴ I have heard of funerals that did not allow for grieving because instead the congregation was expected to celebrate the resurrection, though how wide spread this is unknown.

Glimmers of Hope



Can we Talk of Hope?
A Common Humanity
Theology of Compassion
The Hope of Forgiveness

I was locked in a CERT once, which is Combined Emergency Response team or something and they searched room 3 for mobile phones and pick up afterwards... we had no rights and that was a lovely position to be in, and they were searching the fellows and I sat next to one of the men, Abdullah, who actually works up here at Roxby now. I said to him you're very calm and quiet in all of this and he told me how he once reacted and he got belted up for it. And he said you can see we are prisoners, we have no rights. And that was true, they had no rights at all. And because of the lack of definition of rules and that they never quite knew. And those who had spent time in jail would tell you that jail was much better than detention centres because they had rules and that sort of stuff.

Rev'd Joe

Can We Talk of Hope?

Introduction

I am a Westerner. I have grown up where I have had everything that I have needed and quite a few things that I have wanted. In 2001, I went to live in India to work with a local church as an Occupational Therapist and during the course of the year I encountered people who had little, even some who had nothing. The mother of one child was financially so desperate that she said to me “if I commit suicide it will be one less mouth to feed – maybe the rest of my family will then be able to survive.” How can I talk about hope with credibility having never personally experienced the desperation of that woman, a desperation that is generally far removed from the contemporary Australian experience?

It is this experience which enabled me to understand the tension which Sölle apparently felt. In her writings, she wrote more about why she did not write about hope than on hope itself. Moltmann and the advocates, on the other hand were able to talk about hope, even whilst advocates saw their friends being kept deliberately in a despairing situation. This chapter will explore the points of view of Sölle on the one hand and advocates and Moltmann on the other to see whether it is permissible for those of us with all our needs met to talk about hope. The question of how we then talk about hope will be explored throughout this thesis.

Sölle on Hope

It seems contradictory that in spite of Sölle’s emphasis on action to change the unjust situations in a world where people suffer, she writes sparingly on hope. However, much of her writing on hope relates to the need to create a different situation for the poor and

oppressed. She justifies this lack of writing by reflecting on the source of her hope as arising out of the actions of the poor and marginalised people:

A young Swiss teacher recently asked me from where I could derive any hope. At first, I wanted to reply to him, "from my faith in God, who once rescued an oppressed people from slavery under a great military power." But then it struck me that this is not really "my" faith which bears me up. It is really the faith and the hope of the poor who do not give up.¹

Sölle sees hope as essentially belonging to those who need it most, the poor and oppressed peoples of the world. Whilst hope is important to Christianity, Sölle argues that it does not belong in the affluent West where it has been misused in order to continue the oppression. At the same time, it has been noticed that she did not understand the "joy of the poor";² a stance that perhaps contributes towards her unwillingness to write about hope. The vastness of the difference between her experiences in the affluent West emphasised for Sölle the difference between "theological departments and lecture halls," where she did not feel God, and the vibrant theology on the streets of South America.³ Sölle argues that she has "no political analysis of resistance to offer that justifies hope... but I know from the tradition that sustains the struggling and suffering people of El Salvador that terror will not have the last word."⁴ It is because the poor and oppressed can and do have hope in Christianity that Sölle is able to speak of hope in Christianity.

Hope in Suffering

Sölle focuses her discussion on hope on what she sees as an elementary question, "Where is there any hope for the powerless?"⁵ This question leads on to examining the

¹ Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 20

² Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "Dorothee Sölle: Mystic/Activist," in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 196

³ Dorothee Sölle. *Stations of the Cross: A Latin American pilgrimage*. Translated by Joyce Irwin. 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 92

⁴ Sölle. *War & love*, p. 99

⁵ Sölle. *Work & love*, p. 158

nature of God in a suffering world,⁶ but this latter question will be dealt with in chapter 13

Sölle views hope as a transformative power that enables action in spite of the present situation.⁷ It is not a hope for a better life after death, but rather “Christian hope is hope in which I share in the production of another state. The hope of peace lives with the peacemakers and not beyond them.”⁸ Thus, hope for the future is not real hope unless it is accompanied by actions to transform the present reality.⁹

She argues that acting out hope brings about hope for other people: “We must work toward the time when the inner contradictions of a system of social injustice become so obvious that they move people from apathy to struggle, from despair to hope.”¹⁰

However, with such a focus on the hope for the poor and the oppressed, one could rightly question what relevance this has for those from more affluent backgrounds. Sölle readily critiques the attitude that separates the wealthy from the rest of the world. She argues:

‘Security’ is hope reduced to middle-class terms, yearning on a small scale, a kind of self-limitation that already amounts to mutilation.¹¹

She views the affluent life that seeks to deny suffering as a “phony life”¹² that turns all other life into a hopeless situation.¹³ As discussed in chapter five this leads to a deadening of humanity. Thus, Sölle advocates that the hope for the poor is relevant for all humanity regardless of their wealth. She bases her thinking about hope on the hope

⁶ Ibid., p. 158

⁷ Sölle. *Political Theology*, p. 53

⁸ Sölle. *On earth*, p. 50

⁹ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 165

¹⁰ Sölle. *Work & love*, p. 161

¹¹ Dorothee Sölle. *The window of vulnerability: A political spirituality*. Translated by Linda M Maloney. 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 5

¹² Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 169

¹³ Ibid., p. 169

of the oppressed and suggests that if theology does not speak to the hopes of the poor, then it is a false theology.

Moltmann's Hope

Moltmann, on the other hand, writes extensively about hope. Indeed, it is because of his “Theology of Hope” that he developed an international reputation.¹⁴ In his later work, Moltmann reflects on his time as a young soldier and prisoner of war in relating these experiences.¹⁵ He also draws on Psalm 22, the opening of which is used as the death cry of Jesus in Mark’s gospel: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In many ways, this event is the pivotal event in Moltmann’s life and after his return to Germany; it seems, according to his autobiography, that he has little other personal experience with the depth of suffering that is present in the world. Moltmann’s own reminiscences on his time shows that he was not only well-treated in the camps, but they were also a time of blessing.¹⁶ Can Moltmann’s theology of hope continue to have relevance when early experiences are of hopeful suffering or does Sölle’s position, that Westerners’ hope is drawn from the resistance of those who are suffering, have greater resonance.

However, Moltmann asserts that hope is the central face of Christian faith, and that the Judeo-Christian tradition affirms God is involved in the human hopes for the future is unique among religions.¹⁷ He sees “the hope of Christians bears witness to their realisation of the present’s potential which exists by reason of the abiding covenant of a faithful God.”¹⁸ It is essentially because of God’s action in the world that Christians are

¹⁴ Richard Bauckham. *Moltmann: Messianic theology in the making*. (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987), p. 3

¹⁵ Stephen R. Haynes. *Prospects for post-Holocaust theology*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), p. 109

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann. *The source of life: The Holy Spirit and the theology of life*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 7ff

¹⁷ Moltmann. *In the end* p. 87

¹⁸ Genovesi. *Expectant creativity*, p. 93

able to maintain hope for a different world.¹⁹ However, this raises the issue of what is hope and the question why does Moltmann see Christian hope as unique, even when compared with the other monotheistic religions.

Moltmann asserts, "Hope is not just an appendix";²⁰ indeed, as Bauckham affirms, Moltmann sees hope as central to faith;²¹ as such, Moltmann often asserts St Pauls' triad of faith, hope and love as the key ingredients in Christianity. Moltmann also asserts, "Hope is a command. Obeying it means life, survival, endurance, standing up to life until death is swallowed up in victory."²² In many ways, it is hope which gives life and enables endurance through life and does this through looking toward a different future.²³

Although Moltmann asserts the centrality of hope, he also admits it is more difficult to define.²⁴ It is perhaps because of this that Moltmann advocates caution on the way that hope is used. He writes against fundamentalist interpretations which see hope as leading to "spiritual escape."²⁵ Such interpretations leave action to a future point, whereby God corrects all of the world's evils and humanity is encouraged to bear the unjust situations that arise. With such interpretations, hope becomes numbing, even preventing action to change the situations in which people find themselves. It is worth noting at this point that Bauckham cites the criticism from conservative theologians who assert that Moltmann appears to reduce hope "to human political achievements."²⁶ Bauckham also notes that liberation theologians thought Moltmann's eschatology was too transcendent.²⁷ Such opposing criticisms would suggest that Moltmann has found a middle way between these two perspectives. The practicality of Moltmann's hope

¹⁹ Moltmann. *Hope and planning*, p. 182

²⁰ Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 11

²¹ Volf, "After Moltmann," p. 236

²² Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 20

²³ Moltmann. *Hope and planning*, p. 20

²⁴ Ibid., p. 180

²⁵ Moltmann. *Coming of God*, p. 153

²⁶ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 24

²⁷ Ibid., p. 24

definition cannot be denied. Indeed, he frequently argues that hope cannot be separated from concepts such as love in action, justice and resistance.²⁸ According to Moltmann hope is “the power of life,”²⁹ which is a concrete way of enacting the future reign of God in the here and now.

Whilst this does appear to be similar to Sölle’s rationale for not exploring hope, Moltmann goes further, for his focus is very much on the eschatological hope rather than only the practical changes that need to occur.³⁰ It is this eschatological thinking that drives the action in the present; indeed, the action in the present is a necessary expression of the belief in eschatology.³¹ Moltmann argues that the now does not have the final word. Not all new beginnings emerge in the present and therefore the future, in particular God’s future, is an important concept. He suggests:

The present and the future, experience and hope, initially clash in Christian faith. Between them is the remembrance of Christ crucified by the powers of this world. It is only beyond the cross that we can see the first daybreak colours of God’s new world.³²

This has the potential to hold the future in contradiction of the present³³ and it is “not the outcome of past experiences [but] invitations to new ones.”³⁴ Moltmann argues that because God anticipates the future in the here and now, so too should humanity.³⁵ This anticipation is working towards justice for all humanity as will one day occur in the reign of God. Thus people looking towards the future have no excuse not to be engaged in the present and in bringing about that future.

²⁸ E.g. Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 81

²⁹ Jürgen Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit: A contribution to messianic ecclesiology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. xviii

³⁰ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 207

³¹ Trevor Hart, "Imagination for the kingdom of God?: Hope, promise, and the transformative power of an imagined future," in *God will be all in all: The eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 64

³² Moltmann. *In the end*, 89

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 47

This future is, for Moltmann, firmly based on God's promise, and in particular relates to eschatological hope. This is so much so that Genovesi has suggested "the 'Theology of hope' is somewhat of a misnomer, and that a more accurate description of this particular theological endeavour would speak rather of a theology of promise."³⁶ Moltmann sees that the promises which are yet to be realised in the eschaton are what gives Christians hope. According to Moltmann, the traditional relegation of eschatology "to the 'last day' robbed [the events of the last day] of their ... critical significance for all the days which are spent here, this side of the end."³⁷ Rather, eschatology is, for Moltmann, the basis of Christian hope and the inspiration of Christian hope.³⁸ It is also necessary to maintain hope for change; without eschatology, there is the risk of resignation that leaves the world as it is.³⁹

This resignation is contrary to Christian hope; rather, for Moltmann, the Christian task is to anticipate the "promised future of God"⁴⁰ and in doing so work toward a just future for all creation. Resignation leads to inaction, whereas hope leads to action to change the situation. To take this one step further, for Moltmann, it is faith which enables one to resist the present and work to change the systems of the world.⁴¹ However, Moltmann's focus on eschatological hope could be misread to suggest that his concept of hope does not allow for the need for social justice. Given that Moltmann's hope is in the eventual intervention of God in the world, one could easily question the need to create social change in the here and now. To read his books without two of his lesser-known texts could support this misreading, as has been done by some scholars.^{42,43}

Such a concept must be denied, as Moltmann himself says:

³⁶ Genovesi. *Expectant creativity*, p. 87

³⁷ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 15

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16

³⁹ Moltmann. *Coming of God*, p. 192

⁴⁰ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 56

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16-17

⁴² These texts are *Religion, Revelation and the Future* and Moltmann's autobiography, *A broad place*.

The Christian hope is not a utopia of faith, so that within the framework of a phenomenology of hopes it could be related to a presupposed world process and thus relativised as being “also a possibility.” Rather, in this world with its processes and among men with their wishes, it starts its own process concerning the truth.⁴⁴

However advocates show a third position, namely that of hope in standing alongside the oppressed peoples, and it is for people such as advocates for whom Moltmann writes in his little known “*Theology of Play*.”⁴⁵ In this book Moltmann explores the need for hope for those in the Western world. This is not a hope of being isolated from suffering but rather that the suffering of others can be alleviated. He reflects that such a theology is not for those who are blind to the suffering of the world, but rather for those who would seek to change the suffering.⁴⁶ Thus, it is directed towards people such as the advocates who actively engaged in working against the evils of society.

Hope in Detention

As we have already seen in the previous section, the experiences of asylum seekers in the Australian Immigration Detention Centres under the Howard Government was one of a loss of hope to the point of suicide and despair. Although asylum seekers had experienced highly traumatic events that made them flee their homelands, it was not until they arrived in a country where they should have been safe that their symptoms of mental illness started to show. As has been illustrated in chapter 4, it appears that it was the loss of hope which was a catalyst for this. It could easily be expected that in light of the desperation of the detention centres, a discussion on hope would support that of Sölle’s views that hope is for those who suffer, yet as we shall see advocates saw the issues of hope differently.

⁴³ E.g. in Macquarrie, “Today’s word”, p. 5

⁴⁴ Moltmann. Religion, p. 175

⁴⁵ *Theology of Play* is the title for this book as it was published in the United States; it is worth noting at this point that the British publication was called *Theology of Joy*, which perhaps better reflects the intent of the book.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann. *Theology of play*. Translated by Reinhard Ulrich. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 2

Many advocates saw hope as a view that the future could be different even if it did not appear to be the case in the current time. It was this vision of an alternative future which often spurred them on to work with the refugees in spite of their own difficulties.

Hope for me is aspiration. Things being better or looking forward, anticipation. Hope has some aspects of moving towards joy. [Margaret]

It was because you were aware of how the situation could be different. In other words, it's that hope which draws you beyond the present day cultural situation and without that hope you just, ar, settle for what is, you know. [Rev'd Robert]

This, in many ways, is similar to Sölle's view that hope is for the oppressed, however elements of it also relate to hope for those in the Western culture. This hope is that the current situation is not the final state of affairs, but rather that the prejudices which are expressed by the privileged are dismantled so that they can experience wholeness as well. Rev'd Robert went on to explain that hope and the perception of possible change is the only hope that we have for a more just and equitable world. Rev'd Susan developed this further.

Hope for me is what resurrection is about. It's about God being able to bring new life out of death. It's about believing that even when the world does the absolute worst it possibly can to you and feels like it's totally destroyed you, God is still able to bring new life out of death.

This element of God's presence generating hope was articulated by many of the participants. Rev'd David, who currently works as a chaplain in a psychiatric hospital reflected:

[Hope is] that God is still present, God exists and not to let go of that. Not to let go of the hope, coz I see particularly hope increases the refugees' ability to... at the moment so many people tend to go off that hope and that's like that moment there's numerous people who are suicidal and that's coming back time and time again for them there is no hope. And so like "Aaargh, there it is! There it is!!!"

The presence of God in apparently hopeless situations was particularly important for Rev'd David and in particular he saw the need to help people experience that presence in spite of their situation. Rev'd David also related the importance of hope in helping people to move on from their past hurts and to seek healing and an alternative future.

Other advocates referred more directly to trusting God to change the world, although those who suggested such a point of view were consistently careful to point out that it also involved humanity working with God in order to create the new future.

The image of humanity working with God to change the future was important in the anecdotes which advocates related about their interactions with asylum seekers. Rev'd Joan spoke about an interaction with an asylum seeker who had lost hope:

And I was talking to him in the visitors' area and also his friend Jacob was there and the fellow was telling me that he had no hope and no faith. He had nothing. And I thought, what can I say? And so I looked at Jacob standing there and I said, Jacob was holding your hope. Jacob was holding your faith for you.

In the suicidal despair of the immigration detention centres, it was still possible for Jacob to hold the hope for his friend, whether or not that was appreciated at the time. For this young man it was the friendship of Jacob which enabled him to reconnect with his hope after reaching the point of utmost despair.

The advocates' reflections on hope has so far mostly related to Sölle's sense of hope, a hope for those who are poor and oppressed grounded in and arising out of their struggles. Yet, many advocates experienced secondary trauma and burn-out because of their work with asylum seekers and refugees. Some continued to experience the trauma over five years after they had finished visiting the detention centres. Karen illustrated the need for a theology which considered hope for those experiencing secondary trauma. She related:

A lot of people are very prejudiced and they still are, even in my own church, and I said, my family members, two brothers and two sisters, but they all, my younger sister speaks to me now but I still think she thinks I, you know, shouldn't be doing this, visiting these terrorists and criminals.

In many ways, Karen continues to carry the trauma of visiting the detention centre, not only through the on-going disruption of her family relationships, but also in being unable to deal with the stressors she had experienced. The interview itself was full of

raw emotion telling the stories of asylum seekers she had encountered and seemingly contained little reflection on the events involved. It would appear that she still needs to work through the issues relating to asylum seekers and the impact this has had on her life, and to find hope for herself; hope that belongs to her rather than being secondary from the oppressed people, as Sölle would suggest. Other advocates have also needed the hope of healing, particularly those who have suffered a secondary trauma because of being with and listening to the refugees and asylum seekers over a period time and in such difficult circumstances.

What, then, can we say?

A discourse about hope is therefore critical to Western theology, though not in such a way that enables comfortable people not to engage in the suffering of the world.⁴⁷ There is a need to explore hope for both individuals and societies; societal ideals cannot override individual welfare, nor can the individual freedom override what is good for society as a whole. Hope is needed for all people and particularly it is needed where people choose to be present with those who are oppressed in our society and across the globe.

However, conversations about hope must be careful to exclude concepts of hope which disempower the oppressed from making changes in their lives. There needs to be a balance between eschatological hope and the hope that is generated in the current world. To focus too heavily on eschatology means that the need for justice now is denied, even if this is an unintentional outcome. Looking towards a time in the future when God will intervene in world affairs leads to resignation in the meantime and also to the possibility

⁴⁷ For example, it is this individualised view of salvation that is critiqued in N. T. Wright. *Justification: God's plan & Paul's vision*. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), p. 5. It must be noted that Wright describes himself as an evangelical theologian and so critiques such a limited view of salvation from within such a framework.

that suffering in the current world is willed by God.⁴⁸ Yet to focus Christian hope on the world in the here and now can risk displacing the need for God. Humans become completely responsible to create the “reign of God” which becomes corrupted as shown by attempts through history to establish theocracies on earth.⁴⁹ In such cases, God is pushed aside to human endeavour, and hope is limited because of the limitations of human actions.

Additionally, through emphasising hope in terms of the needs of the oppressed peoples, this risks focusing on action which perhaps goes further than Sölle ever intended. Sölle argues that action for justice is an integral part of the Christian faith, yet her concern for justice would not allow her to restrict the hope of those who are for some reason unable to participate in such action. Such an emphasis would mean that those who cannot participate in acts of justice cannot hope; Moltmann cautions about this:

When a man sees the meaning of life only in being useful and used, he necessarily gets caught in a crisis of living, when illness or sorrow makes everything including himself seem useless.⁵⁰

Whilst Sölle affirms the need for action to change the situations of those who suffer, the advocates do not view action as the sole source of hope. Given they were working in situations where there was very little that could be done practically, they became aware of other dimensions. For Rev'd David, hope was as simple as “something to hold onto in the murkiness of life.” It was both the conviction that things could be different and that God was somehow working in spite of humanity.

What, then, can we say about hope? I believe that Sölle, Moltmann and the advocates would all agree that in the Western context hope is not about looking towards an improvement in our personal situation, nor is it a warm feeling that shuts us off to the

⁴⁸ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 116

⁴⁹ Such as in Calvin's Geneva, see Alister E. McGrath. *A life of John Calvin: A study in the shaping of Western culture*. (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1990), p. 229

⁵⁰ Moltmann. *Theology of play*, p. 19

needs of others. Rather, hope is firmly based in looking towards a changed future, where there is justice for all people. I believe that Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates would all agree that hope looks towards the time when the reign of God is established on earth but does not allow itself inaction until the reign is established. It sees the potential for life to be different and for wholeness for all people regardless of the race, gender or social background. These ideals for hope are present in the descriptions of hope explored so far in this chapter. Although Sölle never explicitly explores this aspect of hope, I would suggest it would speak to her concerns.

This forward-looking nature of hope must of course be differentiated from optimism, a point that is even maintained in secular dictionaries. One popular dictionary defined optimism as “the tendency to expect the best in all things”,⁵¹ whereas hope is almost universally acknowledged to be “a feeling of expectation and desire.”⁵² Hope is, in the secular world, acknowledged as having a greater intensity of emotion. Yet, for Christians, hope is more than simply expectation and desire. Such feelings could potentially be experienced by those seeking to hurt others. Certainly, members of the Nazi Party, or other such groups, could have expressed their anticipation of their actions in terms of desire and expectations. Therefore, Christian hope must have a further dimension to it than that which is expressed within secular definitions. Christian hope must include aspects that seek for a positive outcome for all people, not just those who are like themselves. More importantly, Christian hope must be founded in a sense of God and the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Moltmann has already outlined his views on the Christian basis of hope, yet the experiences of advocates have pointed towards some gaps in his theology. The

⁵¹ "Optimism", in *Collins Australian internet-linked dictionary*, ed. Sandra Anderson, et al. (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004)

⁵² "Hope", in *Collins Australian internet-linked dictionary*, ed. Sandra Anderson, et al. (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004)

remainder of this section on hope will explore the places at which a discrepancy occurs between the theologies of hope of Moltmann and the advocates. It is not my intention to side-line Sölle's writing, but rather she writes little about hope, her writings will only be drawn into the chapters where it is appropriate. I suggest in contrast to Sölle's view, a Western theology of hope is necessary and this is the case not only for the marginalised of our society, but also for the mainstream members. Hope is not only needed to support those who are suffering, or even those who work alongside the suffering, but it is also essential to challenge those who otherwise would be blind to the oppression that is present.

Having identified that it is permissible for those of us living in the affluent Western world to explore what hope means in a Christian context, it is now necessary to turn to some of the key elements of what hope actually is. Moltmann's theology is almost universally acknowledged as the principle contemporary work in the area of hope;⁵³ however, there are aspects of hope identified by advocates that are either missing or substantially different in his theology. Typically, these are aspects from a human point of view rather than from the divine and it is understandable how as a westerner, and particularly in the light of Moltmann's experiences as a German soldier in the Second World War, he may have felt unable to write about these differing aspects of hope. The subsequent chapters in this section will explore what the recognition of a common humanity contributes to hope; the importance of forgiving others and; the role of compassion in generating hope.

⁵³ Miroslav Volf, "Introduction: A queen and a beggar: Challenges and prospects of theology," in *The future of theology: Essays in honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, and Thomas Kucharz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. ix

Baxter Rations

The prisoners at Baxter were rationed to “one boiled egg per week”. Some refused their egg as a protest against yet another mean-spirited action of the ACM managers of detention facilities. 31st August 2003.

One boiled egg every week,
Is ACM’s Baxter ration,
Same for the strong and the meek,
And those who like eggs with a passion.

“Where would you like your boiled egg?”
Asked the neatly dressed ACM cook,
“I’d like you to firmly insert it,
In the place where it came from the chook!”

-AN

A Common Humanity

Introduction

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world... All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.¹

This opening to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sounds, to the modern ear, an obvious statement, yet as will be seen, the recognition of the humanity of asylum seekers, and their basic human rights, did not occur due to the Government's increasingly conservative attitude. How was it that a contemporary country such as Australia, which had prided itself on upholding human rights, could systematically degrade a group of people as happened in the detention centres? This, for me, was one of the most shocking elements of what occurred during the past decade.

In one conversation,² it was related to me by the friend of a trainee detention centre guard that as part of their training, the guards were told to treat asylum seekers as less than human. If this was not an isolated incident, then it would suggest a systematic dehumanisation of both asylum seekers and guards. What value does dignity hold for either side when a group of people are systematically being treated as less than human?

Who are the human ones?

In spite of Moltmann's theology arising in the aftermath of Auschwitz and his experiences of the Second World War, he rarely explores what it means for those who are stripped of their identity and their humanity. Moltmann's discussion on what humanity means is more generally connected to what it means to assert that God

¹ United Nations, "Universal declaration of human rights," United Nations, <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>, preamble.

² The conversation in question was not part of a formal research interview, however since the advocate was talking to me about my research, I am here using a small part of the information gained.

became human. However, since this chapter focuses on what it means to recognise the humanity of others, I will briefly explore Moltmann's theological anthropology.

Moltmann argues that for life to be fully human it needs to be a loved life.³ This statement is made as one of a set of propositions and his intention in this statement is never fully explained, consequently it can be interpreted in unhelpful ways. For many of the asylum seekers, even if there were people to love them, they were separated by vast distances and poor communication. Some had lost their families in the conflicts that had forced them to flee. This, for me, raises the question of what this definition of human life says for those who are no longer experiencing love. Thus Moltmann's definition of human life as loved life risks further marginalisation of those who are already unwanted in our society. It also has the potential to mean that a despot with a loving family is more human than a neglected child. Whilst I do not think this is Moltmann's intention in his statement, such an interpretation is possible which has the potential for serious consequences within the fabric of society.

However, had Moltmann put his definition of life as loved life in the context of the love of God for all people, this potential for the further marginalisation of the unwanted of society would be ameliorated. Such a framing of life would ensure that all people are valued as human regardless of whether they are loved on human terms. It would then serve to reinforce the imperative for justice for all humanity.

Connected to the experiences of being loved is that of being seen as truly human. Moltmann affirms that "the humanity of human life apparently depends directly on the interest in life which we call love;"⁴ that is without love life is scarcely human. It is through being fully human that people are able to participate fully in life.⁵ By

³ E.g. in Moltmann. *God in Creation*, p. 275

⁴ Ibid., p. 268

⁵ Moltmann. *Coming of God*, p. 260

extension, this suggests that one needs to be loved in order to truly live. According to Moltmann, people need to be embedded into their world rather than escaping from it in order to live fully.⁶ Acknowledgement of the day-to-day realities is important; it allows for life to be lived in the present. The importance of staying present to reality is emphasised as Moltmann critiques religious philosophies which focus on escape from this world; he views such philosophies as giving false hope.⁷ At the same time, Moltmann argues that spiritual separation from the world is integral to the Christian faith and that engaging in the suffering ones of the world will lead Christians “deeper into prayer.”⁸ This is therefore a double action, separation in order to be more fully present to the suffering ones in the world.

Naturally, Moltmann acknowledges that outside pressures can restrict the ability of people to be fully human. Yet he argues that:

Whether men [sic] actually avail themselves of the positive opportunities of being human depends less on conditions than on themselves. But we probably cannot discuss the *pressures of unfreedom* and the *encouragement* of freedom on wholly equal terms.⁹

His relating the choice to act humanely back to the individual is reasonable in the light of the many and varied responses to situations of injustice which (as we have seen in relation to the refugees and their advocates) relate more to the choices of individuals than to the situation in hand. However, Moltmann does see the choice of acting humanely as part of the Christian ethic. According to Bauckham, Moltmann argues “the cross commits the Christian to solidarity especially with the most hopeless of humanity.”¹⁰ Thus whilst it is possible for humanity to act in a variety of ways towards others, it does not necessarily mean that all ways are permissible for Christians.

⁶ Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit*, p. 285-286

⁷ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 311

⁸ Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit*, p. 287

⁹ Moltmann. *Theology of play*, p. 52 emphasis in original

¹⁰ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 112

Moltmann does argue that hope, rather than being an ideal future, is the opportunity for new life in the here and now;¹¹ it is perhaps this focus on life that allows for an acknowledgement of humanity. That people can and do live in spite of their experiences of suffering becomes grounds for hope; this living is not merely because there is no alternative, but rather it is in living as a fully human person, engaged in the world, that brings that hope.¹² Moltmann sees hope as “the power of life,”¹³ thus enabling human life even in the most dire circumstances to be truly lived.

In seeming contradiction to this, Moltmann sees the abundance of life as “the death of death.”¹⁴ Abundant life occurs when that which would destroy the humanity within us is itself destroyed. In this way abundant life, the human life, becomes the basis of hope and indeed is what is hoped for in itself. Moltmann calls life, that “can no longer be experienced,”¹⁵ or is not valued and accepted, dead life.¹⁶ The importance of having someone who values each individual appears to be central to Moltmann’s thought, though whether or not it is sufficient to have God as that someone is never made explicit. However, on another level, Moltmann suggests that “fear of death constricts, while hope for eternal life opens a wide space for living beyond death.”¹⁷ On this level, the “death of death” may be taken to relate more to ridding oneself of the fear of death than on a literal level.

Moltmann therefore focuses his theological anthropology on what it means to be alive rather than on what it means to be truly human. Whilst these concepts may interact, they are not necessarily interchangeable. As we shall now see, advocates had a very different view of what it meant to be fully human.

¹¹ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 105

¹² Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 4

¹³ Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit*, p. xviii

¹⁴ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 34

¹⁵ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 143

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moltmann. *Coming of God*, p. 57

Humanity where there is none.

Advocates related that the time they spent with asylum seekers in detention was often one of the few times when the detainees were treated with a sense of humanity. Two advocates spoke extensively about the comparison between the inhumanity shown to asylum seekers by the guards and the need for being seen as human:

So it was the company that they really need because they were detainees and then I like I feel that sometimes God is not there, like God, how these people are suffering and then like sometimes they're treated like animals. They're given a number, not their name. Like the cattle are numbered. [Brenda]

One girl we visited in Sydney some years after her release and she said that for those two hours [when she was visited by George] she would feel like a human being because inside the detention centre, in the visitor's centre in the detention centre it was a completely different environment... I mean the human spirit and this girl herself said that in two hours I feel like I am a human being again, because you're called by name and you're not BX252 or something, come there's a letter or phone call or something like that. [Larry]

One of the most important things that advocates were able to do for asylum seekers was recognise their humanity. In a place where so little humanity was offered by the guards, the fact that advocates saw asylum seekers as people gave strength and hope.

Seeing the person first and foremost was another aspect which enabled asylum seekers to be treated as fellow human beings. The issues that people faced were seen as secondary to the fact that the people were fellow human beings. Rev'd Steve highlighted the importance of seeing the person:

But hopefully what you see more is the people so it's not John and he is poor and that's where John lives. But this person happens to be poor, but this person is who this person is.

Getting to know the human beings behind the images was also important for other advocates. One advocate, who had first seen issues of race in the 1960s in the campaign to allow Aboriginal people the vote explained that from those experiences he learnt:

Don't trust what people say about other people, you have to meet them first, you have to be there, where they're at, not sit back and say other positions and make

your judgement without having first walked some of the track, or at least known the track that they've walked. [Rev'd Walter]

It was this ability to not judge a person based on what others have said which led Rev'd Walter into further engagement with asylum seekers.

For many advocates, it was the expression of humanity in the face of the system that drew them into supporting asylum seekers and refugees. They acknowledged the imperfection of humanity, yet saw it as having potential to rise above the current system:

There is going to be suffering. But I think also because um, we are, we are human being and we are not perfect we are not gods if you like, we haven't got perfection and we are prone to error, we are prone to failure and we will force pain and suffering and we will also experience pain and suffering. [Joyce]

The self is created in relation to God because it goes beyond what you are yourself. It's not just satisfying your own satisfactions. You know, and it's related to a much bigger universe. [Rev'd Don]

The failure of the system to recognise the humanity in asylum seekers extended to issues relating to the detainees identity. Not only were they called by numbers, but also their assertions of identity were commonly disbelieved. Several advocates reported that authorities did not believe asylum seekers' statements regarding their nationality and on occasions asylum seekers were told they were not the people they claimed to be. This was exacerbated because asylum seekers were unable to take identity documents with them as they fled their country of origin because such documents if they existed in the first place would have created further danger for them with their nation's authorities.

An advocate related:

One of the stories that was this family, actually, because the husband came down with his wife and two daughters who then returned to Indonesia, they couldn't bear the uncertainty of things. And women are not usually in quite such a difficult position, so he stayed on. Then his second wife, her husband was killed in front of her and she arrived with 2 small children and then she met her husband and they married, but immigration would never believe that she was who she said [she was]. Because someone must have been someone who had a grudge against them put in a letter to say that she was actually the first wife

come back again. And so her identity was never accepted. And she went through incredible three-hour interviews with immigration while they tried to decide who she really was. It was so distressing for her, not to be believed. [Bonnie]

Such questioning of an individual's identity was not uncommon in the visa application process and had the potential to affect asylum seekers' self-identity. Gloria reflected on the ways in which attacks were made on the "sense of self and integrity" of asylum seekers, particularly in the light of their degrading treatment after the trauma which had prompted them to leave their own countries. As was noted in chapter four, trauma often creates a loss of self-identity as a protective mechanism. Thus the potential to heal those past hurts was removed by the inhumanity of the situation which denied the identity of asylum seekers. Conversely, it is easy to understand why the actions of advocates assisted that healing by recognising asylum seekers as fellow humans. A further attack on identity occurred because asylum seekers released on bridging visas were not allowed to contribute to society even by performing volunteer work; Rev'd Kathleen spoke of one asylum seeker who felt "he was really there without a purpose, existing on generosity and feeling like a burden and a drag." Research has noted that particularly for men the worker role is an important part of the identity;¹⁸ therefore to forcibly remove that role is an attack on one's self worth.

In contrast to some traditional theologies which saw humanity as inherently sinful,¹⁹ many advocates felt this was not the case suggesting there was the possibility for people to do good or do evil. As we have seen in chapter six, whilst advocates agreed that humanity was responsible for the evils in the world, they felt they did have a choice with regards to whether or not they perpetrated that evil. The implication of this is that humanity's starting point is that of possibility and potential as opposed to badness.

¹⁸ Donald C Reitzes, "Self-concept as the organization of roles: Importance, centrality, and balance", *Sociological quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2002), p. 664

¹⁹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. *The fall to violence: Original sin in relational theology*. (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 16

Every human being has the potential to express goodness and it is often chance or circumstance which guides this. This more positive aspect of humanity gave advocates hope.

Some advocates saw hope as arising out of the human potential for strength. That people were able to maintain their humanity and even hope in difficult situations gave advocates cause for hope and encouraged them to continue their efforts to support asylum seekers. Rev'd Joe saw hope as "drawing on that deep down resilience of the human spirit." Others drew on John's Gospel:

"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." I think that's what we're all asked to do. [James]

Fullness of life is about being the person that God created rather than being broken and traumatised as happened to many of the asylum seekers and refugees. In many ways advocates saw their role as assisting people to regain their fullness of life.

In the same way that recognising the humanity in others was important to advocates, they also related it as being important to the refugees and asylum seekers. According to many advocates, asylum seekers who converted to Christianity had the common element that they did so because they saw it as more humane than their experiences of Islam. Michael related:

And in later conversation with a couple of these guys in a coffee shop, they made the point that the important thing for them changing from Islam to Christianity was that they abhorred the way in which people were treated. It was the non-humane expressions of personal relationships and so on that really upset them and would have been part of their reason for getting out of Iran in the first place.

Whilst this naturally does not represent the only attitude in Islam, it does represent what these particular asylum seekers saw as orthodox Islamic teaching. Recognising that all people were made in the image of God was therefore a central motif in the work of advocates and often in the stories of asylum seekers as well.

Made in the Image of God

Theological anthropology has long investigated the question of what it means to be human; indeed, it was one of the questions faced by the early church.²⁰ Advocates responded to this question in differing ways. Not only was it a question of how to be humane but also, by virtue of their time with asylum seekers, there was the question of how one continues to be human in the face of the systematic oppression which occurred within the detention centres.

Like the theological anthropologists, advocates drew on a variety of biblical texts to argue for the common humanity of all people.

So God created humankind in his image,
In the image of God he created them;
Male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

My father had a sermon that was one of the standard sermons on Aboriginal people based on the story of Peter and his dream about Cornelius [Acts 10]. If we can't call anything that God made unclean, then who fails the test? [Ron]

The affirmation that all humanity is created in the image of God is central in justifying, from a Christian point of view, the common dignity and human rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However it does more than this. It was this conviction of a common humanity that was one of the key motivating forces behind advocates' work with refugees and asylum seekers. Additionally, it was being recognised as fellow humans, in spite of the system seeking to strip humanity, which enabled asylum seekers to continue to have hope for a changed situation. What is probably more notable was the recognition of the humanity of those who were the perpetrators and, for at least some advocates, an unwillingness to discount it. In contrast to the system, those who were caught up in the suffering of the detention centres could understand their common humanity shared with the guards.

²⁰ Ann Elizabeth O'Hara Graff. *In the embrace of God: Feminist approaches to theological anthropology*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 192

The connection between humanity and hope demonstrates a missing element in Moltmann's theology of hope. Whilst this cannot be explored in sufficient depth at this point, some initial reflections on a hopeful theology of humanity are useful. Firstly, the biblical text, as has been seen, affirms the common humanity of all. This affirmation means that one cannot be treated as less than human because of any characteristic, be it race, gender or social circumstance. Therefore, in situations where this humanity is denied, there needs to be action to counter inhumanity. Although Moltmann affirms this, he does not draw it to its conclusion of what it means in connection to hope. The common humanity could, in Moltmann's terminology, be called a kingdom vision. When this is no longer an ideal recognised by individuals and congregations, but rather is reality for all people, then there truly will be the anticipation of the reign of God in the world.

Graff agrees with this assessment and suggests that in addition to affirming *imago Dei* (image of God), Christians also need to affirm *imago Christi* – the image of Christ in each person. She suggests:

In an age when basic human dignity is systematically ignored and violated through horrors that include “ethnic cleansing,” rape as a weapon of warfare, and the abuse and deprivation of children throughout the world, the “image of God” in human persons is revealed as an image desecrated, the image of Christ crucified.²¹

If we are to affirm the humanity of Christ and his messianic title the “Son of Man,” (i.e. the Human One) then this recognition of the crucified ones in those who are suffering needs also to be affirmed. As we have already seen in chapter eight, this is one of Sölle's images: Christ is crucified again and again when people are oppressed, tortured or dying for lack of the basics of life.

²¹ Ibid.

Secondly, drawing on the reflections of advocates, part of being seen as human involves being seen as having an identity. This is not to say that those, such as in the detention centres and concentration camps, who were stripped of their identity are less than human, but rather it affirms that each and every human being has the right to an identity, which includes being known by name and not by number. This need for identity is also recognised in the biblical text. Isaiah 43:1 affirms, “I have redeemed you, I have called you by name,” words which Westermann called “the very heart of Deutero-Isaiah’s proclamation.”²² These words, spoken to the captives of Exiled Israel, are words of hope to those captive in a strange land, and hence it was like serendipity for Rev’d Joan when she preached on this text for a Christmas sermon in a detention centre without her knowing that the detainees were called by numbers and not their names.

Also drawing on the concept of being “called by name” is McArdle, who sees Isaiah 43:1 as expressing not only God’s concern for people, but also the relational nature of Christian anthropology.²³ In his view, relationship is at the very centre of what it is to be human. This can be applied to the situation of advocates and asylum seekers. The relationship between them, in spite of the cultural, linguistic and religious barriers affirmed the humanity of asylum seekers as unique individuals who are beloved of God.

That God knows and cares for each person individually is one of the great assertions of the Bible, present through the Psalms, Prophets and into the Gospels. Whilst these texts have often been misinterpreted in an individualistic way,²⁴ if the reign of God is, as Moltmann suggests, calling for human action, then the recognition of identity and common humanity is also about a call for changed action in the world.

²² Claus Westermann. *Isaiah 40-66: A commentary*. Translated by David M. G. Stalker. (London: S.C.M. Press, 1969), p. 115

²³ Patrick McArdle, "Called by name: Contemporary Christian anthropology", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 2 (2005), p. 221

²⁴ Ibid. p. 22

Recognition of the common humanity of all people provides a framework and justification for social justice over and against all forms of oppression. If all people are made in the image of God, then it follows that God cares for each person, regardless of that person's situation. This is not so much a negating of differences between individuals, as Frenandez asserts:

To say that colour does not matter in the eyes of God does not show impartiality to all colours, but obliterates other colours in favour of whiteness (noncolourness). God transcends colours not by becoming colourless and "colour-blind," but by becoming colourful and colour-loving.²⁵

Such recognition of humanity is a celebration of the uniqueness of each person and recognition of the special care each person requires. For those who have been oppressed, it is not merely removing the oppression, but also mitigating the effects which the oppression has had on their lives. It is only through this second step that true equality is reached. Furthermore, the concept of common humanity allows for the development of language which can communicate ideals across the boundaries of Christianity and into secular discourse. As can be seen in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the inherent dignity of all human beings is one of its central tenets.

The recognition of humanity of the suffering ones of our world is important in their maintenance of hope. As Christians therefore it is highly important that we do not only explore humanity in terms of God's engagement with the world, but also to develop a theology that acknowledges the common humanity of all marginalised people. To fail to do this not only demeans the oppressed peoples, but also prevents those of us who are not marginalised from becoming "fully" human. Only when we are able to embrace this common humanity are we able to address the issues of evil that create sin and suffering within the world and thereby be part of bringing hope.

²⁵ Eleazar S. Fernandez. *Reimagining the human: Theological anthropology in response to systemic evil*. 1st ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), p. 149

In fact, as the Iranians left and I kept going, I was swamped initially by Sri Lankans whose situations were torturous and the federal government was trying to get the Tamil rebels declared terrorists so that they would have to be returned home. But I remember the Tamil man who said to me my father has died. If I stay in Sri Lanka the government will not believe that I have not joined the Tamils and either the government will kill me or the Tamils will. My mother and sisters will survive in subsistence rice farming, but I can't and that was a very common story.

Ron

Theology of Compassion

Introduction

It seems to me that compassion has become a “dirty” word in Australian culture. When I read the letters to the editor page of the newspapers, there is almost always at least one letter which is essentially criticising people for being compassionate.¹ Yet for Christians, the gospel stories frequently show that Jesus had compassion for people, particularly the struggling and suffering ones.² The Old Testament also highlights the compassion of God towards the erring people of Israel.³ For those who supported asylum seekers and refugees, compassion was one of the motivating forces in their choice to undertake this counter-cultural activity. The overwhelming majority of advocates spoke of the importance of compassion, yet it is a concept which is only sparingly discussed by Moltmann who focuses on love. This chapter will explore the issue of compassion and the differences between compassion and love. It will also advocate for an expanded theology of compassion in contemporary Christianity.

Love as Central to Hope

Moltmann’s theology focuses on the concept of love rather than compassion and how this motivates action. However, he does speak of “patricompassionism”:⁴ the affirmation that God suffered because of God’s compassion for Christ on the cross. Yet love and hope are, for Moltmann, inseparable concepts with each feeding into the other.

He suggests “the love in which we fully identify ourselves with this transient,

¹ In reviewing the letters to the editor in *The West Australian* for June and July 2010, several times per week there were letters either criticising “do-gooders” or maligning marginalised people such as asylum seekers and Aboriginal people.

² E.g. Matthew 14:14; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13

³ E.g. Isaiah 40

⁴ John J. O'Donnell. *Trinity and temporality: The Christian doctrine of God in the light of process theology and the theology of hope*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 146

vulnerable, and mortal life and the resurrection hope belong together and interpret each other.”⁵ Hope looks towards a better future for the beloved,⁶ but love demands that the future cannot simply be left as an otherworldly dream; it has to be made present in the here and now.⁷ It requires that a person is changed because of the suffering of others.⁸ In this way, love also connects to suffering and brings hope into situations of suffering. Out of compassion for the beloved, love leads to the deliberate exposure to “wounds of disappointment, contradiction, sickness and death”,⁹. It also involves walking alongside the suffering ones and hence taking on some of that suffering. It is this suffering element of love that is part of its greatness.¹⁰ Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, Moltmann goes as far as to assert that one of the requirements for defining life is that it is *loved* life,¹¹ an assertion that contains an essential truth, but can also be highly problematic.

Whilst Moltmann focuses on the love of God for humanity, he does not restrict his thinking to this. He suggests that “love participates in the history of God’s suffering.”¹² He further argues that when people suffer either for their own justice or for the justice of others, the church is made present and, by extension, God is there. Thus love calls people both into action on behalf of others and also into suffering through solidarity. In

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann. *Religion, revolution, and the future*. Translated by Douglas Meeks. (New York: Scribner, 1969), p. 57

⁶ Moltmann. *Hope and planning*, p. 196

⁷ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 175

⁸ Richard Bauckham. *The theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), p. 49

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann. *God in creation: An ecological doctrine of creation: The Gifford lectures 1984-1985*. Translated by Margaret Kohl, Gifford lectures. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 268

¹⁰ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 49

¹¹ Moltmann. *God in Creation*, p. 275

¹² Jürgen Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit: A contribution to messianic ecclesiology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) p. 65

the same way that God reaches out in love to those who are different,¹³ so can humans in response to that love.

Love is essential for hope and vice versa. Moltmann argues that “love looks to the as yet unrealised possibilities of the other,”¹⁴ thus recognising the future possibilities of the other. This love is not restricted to those with whom one is already in a relationship, but rather it is “prevenient and unconditional love. Its most perfect form is the love of one’s enemies.”¹⁵

Compassion: With Passion

Feeling compassion for the refugees and asylum seekers was one of the key motivators for advocates. Indeed, it was one of the few concepts which virtually everyone raised. Not only was it the motivating force behind their work but in many ways working with refugees and asylum seekers developed the advocates’ compassion. They found they had more patience than previously imagined and that through their expanded compassion they had a greater understanding of humanity. Barbara related:

I think our contact with, not only refugees but everyone that we have come in contact with, people who need help or whatever it is, they have helped us to accept people as they are. No matter how different they are or maybe difficult they are sometimes, you just have to accept them as they are and do whatever you can to assist them to be who they are meant to be.

This compassion could at times be difficult because the government was calling the asylum seekers “illegals” and raising the fear among the Australian population that terrorists could be among the boat people. However, for advocates, compassion was more important than the messages being given by the government. It did not matter that

¹³ Richard Bauckham. *Moltmann: Messianic theology in the making*. (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987), p. 69

¹⁴ Jurgen Moltmann. *Theology of hope: On the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology*. Translated by James W. Leitch. 5th ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 338

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 337

the official government line was that these were people who were not wanted;¹⁶ advocates primarily saw the suffering human beings.

A person in want and in need is a person in want and need; being Muslim comes a long way down the list of whether you help them or not. It's just not something you could take into consideration. [Nancy]

Whilst there are systems that create suffering for other people, engagement in these systems is a choice of the individual. The advocates made the choice not to be part of the fear campaign by the Howard Government. They took the alternative path of compassion and working counter to the system. Joyce, reflecting on issues of freewill related:

But if we can choose, we can also choose love. We can also choose to be compassionate and humane.

Compassion for those caught up in such a situation was often the first reason to visit the asylum seekers in detention. Over time this led to friendships being developed and consequently many advocates sought to reform the untenable situation. Although barriers of language and culture remained, the strangers who had come seeking asylum became friends. It was an act of compassion that enabled a stranger to break down these barriers in order for friendships to develop. Janet related that:

The first visit we imagined that it was perhaps a one-off visit perhaps to find out what was going on and report back and try and write a letter or two. But we realised, for me, it wasn't going to be that. I couldn't just leave those people there in that situation which at that time seemed to be quite hopeless.

She later reflected:

So I guess it gave me the opportunity to show, like to show compassion and hope and faith to people who were really hoping for something like that, who really needed it, who hadn't experienced it so far in their dealings with people in Australia much, and just were very fearful of what the future might hold.

Compassion for asylum seekers led to action which became focused mainly on solidarity rather than change, and this solidarity was important in supporting asylum

¹⁶ Linda Briskman, Christopher R. Goddard, and Susie Latham. *Human rights overboard: Seeking asylum in Australia*. (Carlton North: Scribe Publishing, 2008), p. 12

seekers through their difficult times. Like the asylum seekers, advocates were often limited in terms of what they were able to do. They could offer some practical support, such as writing to politicians and bringing gifts to ensure that people had their basic needs met. However in terms of speeding up the process of being released from detention or even improving the situation within the centres, there was very little advocates could achieve. Even so, the solidarity offered by advocates was important to the refugees and asylum seekers as it reduced the feelings of isolation and loneliness inherent in the detention system. This was illustrated by Rev'd Joan, who had visited detainees when they were in a centre near her home. On one occasion:

The people that had been sent to Baxter were really deteriorating badly and there was a particular thing going on [a hunger strike by some detainees] and Zoe said to me "Rev'd Joan, we are going on a hunger strike. We will be in there," and her husband who is the head of the hospital there, much to my surprise said, "Well, I'll monitor you both." Anyway, we ended up not doing it because the situation was resolved.

Compassion was not limited to asylum seekers who were hurt by the system; indeed, such limits would have risked the creation of a "them and us" mentality which characterised much of Australian political life at the time. As unlikely as it may seem, some advocates also felt compassion for the guards. Where this occurred there was a variety of reasons. Most advocates who expressed compassion differentiated between the guards who treated the detainees with some decency and those who did not. One advocate described one of the former:

He was one of the guys who ran the visiting centre and he was quite humane about it. And would let us know when he thought someone was feeling quite down or was traumatised or had had bad news or something. And he let the ministers, the various ones know so that they could come in and visit all, just now when they were there for the church services, that so and so would want a chat with you and that, which I thought was fantastic. [Rev'd Janice]

This guard seemed unusual in his treatment of the asylum seekers; it appears from the accounts of the advocates that most of the guards were harsh. Other advocates realised the guards were caught up in the system and were often ill-equipped personally to work

with a traumatised population. According to advocates, guards were often people who had previously been unemployed and were given minimal training in cultural sensitivity. Advocates however, also reflected the humanity of the guards:

I think, you know, like the old concentration guards, in concentration camps, some of them would have been utter bastards, but they were good people but the system took all that away from them. [Rev'd Joe]

It was a little bit hard to deal with because you had this resentment against the officers, the guards, because you knew the things they had done, but some of them you had to understand that they were human, the officers were sympathetic. [Ken]

The situation in the detention centres systematically stripped away the humanity of not only the asylum seekers, but the guards as well. Elizabeth observed:

If we wrote and complained about the ones that were not nice, they got promoted. If we wrote and said thank you to the ones that were nice, they got moved sideways.

If this report is correct, then it is understandable that the guards learnt to mistreat the asylum seekers in the detention centres.

Advocates also spoke of the compassion that was shown to them by the asylum seekers. Often this is the aspect which advocates found most challenging because the compassion was despite the situation with which the asylum seekers had to cope. Being compassionate was not easy in the detention centres. Indeed, for at least one asylum seeker it could heighten the distress experienced.

For instance, I had a man once who left Aceh when his wife was pregnant and had never seen his son and got extraordinarily distressed when, at that stage there were a lot of demonstrations in Villawood by the families. And he got really distressed by what was happening to the children¹⁷ because of not knowing what was happening to his own child. [Bonnie]

The difficulties experienced in immigration detention also broke down the barriers between groups of people who traditionally had animosity towards each other. One

¹⁷ Children were present during the riots, hunger strikes and suicide attempts by the asylum seekers. Much of this is documented in *ibid.*.

couple who spoke both Singhalese and Tamil would visit asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and saw the divisions between these groups were being healed. Another spoke of two young refugees:

They both had their troubles. And you would have to expect that was going to happen with some of them because they are human beings and they are all different. The wonderful thing that I think has happened out of all of that is that these fellows who were detained, there were some that were of the same nationality, but most of them were from different nationalities and they just bonded as brothers and they still are. Now given normal circumstances I would expect that some of those with the cultures and ethnicity, all that sort of thing, would have made them totally different, but they just clung to one another and they still do. [Larry]

The pressures in the immigration detention centres required that these two isolated young men had to break down the traditional barriers between them in order to survive. Through this experience they learnt compassion for a group of people with whom they may not have previously communicated or may even have been traditional enemies.

Many advocates also spoke of the care which the refugees and asylum seekers had for themselves. Often this was one of the few things that could be given back to those who visited. In many ways, it turned the relationship into a friendship, rather than simply being one-sided. One young visitor spoke of the care she received from an asylum seeker during a difficult time. She realised:

Someone who has no control over his situation other than how he reacts to it, and even that was pretty hard on a psychological level, could still be compassionate and perhaps their compassion meant more than when someone relatively secure deigns to help you. [Virginia]

This same detainee was one of the few asylum seekers who were able to express compassion for those caught up in the system and to recognise the humanity in people who were acting in inhumane ways:

It was like, they sometimes felt sorry, like Hassan would talk about “Auntie Amanda” – Amanda Vanstone – there was a humour in there and I don’t know if I’m reading too much into it, but there was almost like a compassion for her, you know, felt sorry for her because she just didn’t get it. [Virginia]

Remarkably this would suggest that some asylum seekers and refugees showed compassion not only to the people who supported them or even to those whom they knew personally, but also to individuals such as politicians who held power over them and misused that power. Compassion was more than a survival mechanism for the asylum seekers; it was a depth of feeling of the humanity for the other, regardless of whether that person recognised the asylum seekers' humanity.

Connecting with Others

A further element of compassion which also brought hope to asylum seekers and advocates was that of the relationships which formed through visiting. These relationships made a significant difference for asylum seekers, advocates and their communities. It was often important on both sides of the relationships to be active in the friendship. Gloria spoke of visiting a particular couple in the detention centre:

They felt they were doing something for us, so they would make a drink. The Vietnamese couple, he made his own garden in Baxter. He told us he used a broken mop handle, a vegetable garden with herbs and he would give us stuff to take back with us. We'd often take things home with us. They like to share, I suppose.

Other advocates reflected on the importance of asylum seekers and refugees being able to give something back to their visitors. They postulated that for the detainees it represented control in their lives. Yet it was also the reciprocal relationships which were more appreciated by advocates. As one advocate reflected:

So the value is the personal links, and the links that have lasted in my mind are the ones where there is some sort of reciprocity. As soon as they are paternal, one-sided, give, give, give, give; take, take, take, take it becomes a bit of a game. [Margaret]

In many instances refugees living in the community were limited in what they were able to do. Being reliant on charity for their daily living expenses meant that refugees were aware of the one-sidedness of their relationships. Margaret related how she had encouraged refugees staying with them to use their skills to contribute to the household

whilst they were unable to contribute financially. She gave the example of asking a refugee who was a skilled welder to help mend a fence.

As mentioned in chapter 10, relationships also assisted asylum seekers to maintain their identity. In detention asylum seekers were commonly called by numbers rather than names; relationships therefore assisted in helping them maintain their sense of humanity in spite of their situation. Rev'd Joan spoke of taking a Baptism service in a detention centre:

I just looked at the people and I hardly knew what to say to them. In such a situation. I can remember saying I felt very convinced about it, because there was such a feeling of being lost from, forgotten and lost. And that I said that God knows you, knows your name, knows where you are and wherever you go. God knows you and knows that you are there.

At that stage she did not know about the policy to call detainees by numbers. On reflection she saw how significant her sermon was to those who were losing their sense of humanity.

It was the advocates' relationships with asylum seekers which changed their attitudes towards other people in general.

So I try not to put up barriers; I try not to be judgmental. I know I am sometimes, but that's because I am human. But if I can step away from that, I do. So that's what drives me and love one another as I have loved you. So therefore, that's good to do. [Rev'd Richard]

You can't get involved in anyone's life in an area like this, anyone's life and it doesn't affect you and change you. I went through all sorts of things, frustration, feeling completely useless, powerless, quite angry. And all those, hopefully healthy emotions. [Rev'd Joe]

Because of their work with asylum seekers and refugees many advocates became more accepting of difference. This change in attitude affected the way in which they encountered others not only marginalised groups.

Rev'd Janice was also in a position where she was able to see the differences in attitudes in the community. She described seeing, over a period of time, the way in which staff

at the nearby hospital gradually began to see the asylum seekers as human beings with the same hopes and fears as theirs. It was this process which further broke down the barriers between the town and the detainees, even though language barriers remained.

This relationship with individual people seemed to be a common denominator in the changing of racist attitudes. Through being able to see the human faces behind the razor wire, communities became more accepting of asylum seekers; the government of the day had a policy of not allowing humanising footage of asylum seekers to be shown in the media.¹⁸ The work of advocates in sharing those human images and stories was therefore of critical importance. Advocates communicated to their communities that asylum seekers are humans with the same hopes and fears as the rest of the community. When the reasons for coming to Australia became known, often because of fleeing the same regimes that Australia was condemning, people were more willing to accept them as part of Australian society. As Rev'd Lyn reflected:

And folk I know who are quite judgemental about folk, others who come to this country to supposedly take from us that we owned that we want. It's unbelievable. Neighbours and relatives saying they're coming to take this country, we've made it as it is and they just want to take over. But when you speak to these judgemental folk about individuals that we've encountered their attitudes seem to soften. I think partly it's because they can see that we are very passionate about what we do and they have to learn to respect that. I think it's also when you meet people face to face or meet them second hand as it were; it's hard to maintain those prejudices. Especially with children. In particular with children.

Another advocate suggested:

The refugee project officer on the Council of Churches reckons my philosophy was that if we could get half of Adelaide's population to visit Baxter it would be closed. [Ron]

As people visited the immigration detention centres, they began to see fellow human beings who were affected and to develop relationships with them. Maintaining

¹⁸ Dean Lusher and Nick Haslam. *Yearning to breathe free: Seeking asylum in Australia*. (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 2007), p. 153

relationships with individual people was vital to maintain hope for those in detention. From the reflections of advocates, it appears that when asylum seekers were most despairing it was relationships with people who treated them humanely which were crucial in maintaining the strength to keep going. Rev'd Helen spoke of a suicidal refugee who had travelled some distance to take his life:

By this time, he started to turn things over in his head and said, "I'm not sure if I want to kill myself because there are all these people who love me and care for me."

For Shuyab, another asylum seeker, although he was prepared to die, it was the frequent phone calls from someone who cared that made a significant difference in finding the strength to keep living.

To talk to somebody who has lost all hope and who is just straight out down the line tired is bad enough. But someone who is just no will to do anything; just he just said to me I am tired, I cannot go on. And I said, but if you don't eat, you'll die. And he said I'm not afraid to die. Then I got upset over the phone. And said but you can't die, you're young and you've got many things to live for, many things to look forward to. And all that. He said, you do not understand which is true I had no comprehension and anyway he said, please ring me again soon. And I said I'll ring you every day if you like. And I ended up ringing him every day for the 5 weeks that he was on hunger strike. [Elizabeth]

Having a relationship with someone who had compassion was for him was the one thing that gave Shuyab the strength to keep living. Even when he had no hope, the fact that someone else had a depth of love for him meant that in spite of the awfulness of the situation in which he found himself, he could live even when he could see no future. It is the compassion of these relationships that made a significant difference in the lives of the asylum seekers even when there was no practical outcome from those relationships.

Towards Compassion

Compassion, as we have seen, was very important to advocates and asylum seekers in dealing with the suffering in the immigration detention centres. Indeed, when exploring the issue of hope, compassion can be seen as a central theme for this group of people.

However, as stated previously, Moltmann writes sparingly on compassion and focuses instead on the concept of love. Advocates also explored the concept of love but saw this as a different element in that although compassion may contribute towards love, it is significantly different. Interestingly in theological literature the concepts of compassion and hope appear to be treated separately.

The Hebrew origin for the word compassion (*rahamin*) is derived from the word for womb and relates to “the mother’s physical and psychological bond with her child.”¹⁹ In contrast, the word love in Christian thought has been defined as being “an affective disposition toward another person arising from qualities perceived as attractive, from natural relationship, or from sympathy.”²⁰ However, as Downey notes, concepts of compassion have been misinterpreted in Christian history and for some it now has an implication of piousness and even the romanticising of the crucifixion.²¹ However, advocates saw compassion both as a core value in Christianity, and as central to the biblical text. One advocate expressed concern at forms of Christianity which do not have compassion for other people:

They had obviously taken on board fundamentalism and that’s a killer as far as I am concerned, because it doesn’t have the compassion Christianity ought to have. [Barbara]

This concern regarding a form of Christianity lacking in compassion is supported by biblical texts in which issues of compassion are deeply rooted. From the earliest stories in the Old Testament, it is God’s compassion for the suffering people which leads to action as shown in the Exodus story (e.g. Exodus 3:7-8) and in rescue from oppression, both during Philistine invasions (e.g. Judges 6:7) and during the Exile. However, it is in

¹⁹ Elizabeth Dreyer, "Love", in *The new dictionary of Catholic spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ James Dallen, "Forgiveness"ibid.

the Psalms and the Prophets that the image of God as compassionate is particularly noted. For example, Isaiah likens God's compassion to a mother saying:

Can a woman forget her nursing child,
Or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even if these may forget,
Yet I will not forget you (Isaiah 49:15)

The compassionate God is not only a theological image of the Old Testament, but also one which is integral to the expression of Jesus' ministry as found in the New Testament's gospel stories. It was to these stories of Jesus showing compassion for the poor that advocates turned to in their descriptions of what compassion meant for them. The prevalence of compassion in the Gospel stories is illustrated by one advocate who in reflecting on hope said:

It's the hope that Jesus gives to individuals in the different healing stories when they become included in their community and restored. So the woman who bled for 12 years, the Samaritan woman at the well, all of those stories. Bartimeus. It's all the nobodies who are given roles, who are shown to have faith and shown to be valued and worthwhile. [Rev'd Kathleen]

Thus, advocates saw acts of compassion as being central to the ministry of Jesus and hence to their perception of Christian life. Yet, if compassion is so central to Christianity, as has been argued, the question must be raised as to why there has been so little written on a theology of compassion and the hope that it generates.

It is the connection between compassion and hope which becomes important in this context. Like hope, compassion is helpless, although it can also motivate action. As with the asylum seeker who sewed his lips together in an act of compassion for a friend who had lost all hope, the symbolic actions of compassion can generate the hope that one is not alone. Even when there is no action that will make a practical difference, the standing alongside another in compassion makes a difference.

If a framework of a theology of compassion is to be developed and connected to hope, then the reflections of advocates give insight into some important aspects which need to

be included. Compassion is more than a romanticising of pain or even a pious attitude. It does not minimise pain or say “I know how you feel” as an intellectual exercise. Rather, compassion is about a genuine engagement with the pain of the other, as the original Latin word implies. It also has to be differentiated from sympathy, which is “feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune”²² Drawing on the Hebrew connection between compassion and the womb,²³ it could be suggested that compassion involves an emotional bond that goes far beyond the intellectual understanding that is involved with empathy. Compassion involves a “feeling with” the other in perhaps the most literal sense of both the Latin and Hebraic words.

Yet compassion is more than simply “feeling with” for it also affects the suffering person. Through relating to another, compassion involves holding up a mirror which looks towards a different future. Compassion is not only seeing the hurt and wounded person in a situation of pain, but also seeing the potential of that person and reflecting that back together with what the future could hold. Like love, compassion also calls for a response to the person and the situation. Perhaps then, the link with hope and compassion is the removal of isolation experienced in suffering. It is by connecting to the feelings of isolation and aloneness that relationships can be established and hope generated. Sölle expresses this in terms of solidarity:

Christ is a name which for me expresses solidarity, hence suffering with, struggling with, Christ is the mysterious power which was in Jesus and which continues on and sometimes makes us into “fools in Christ,” who, without hope of success and without an objective, shared life with others.²⁴

²² “sympathy *n.*” *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, Twelfth edition . Ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2008. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Murdoch University. 9 September 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e56906>>

²³ Both words have the same Hebrew root (rhm) which indicates a connection between the two concepts.

²⁴ Dorothee Sölle. *Theology for skeptics: Reflections on God*. Translated by Joyce Irwin. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 93

Solidarity is not just standing alongside another. In many ways it is an act of companionship which implies relating to others and not simply seeing them as objects of pity. A Christian theology of compassion therefore affirms the need for solidarity. Even when no action can be taken, it means engaging in the helplessness of the suffering ones, and where change can be made doing what can be done without losing the relationship.

A theology of compassion is therefore an essential part of responding to the injustice of the world and consequently needs to be developed more fully than has occurred to date. Through developing connections and relationships, compassion brings hope to those who are suffering thus reducing isolation.

Monkey Business

Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.
One won't hear and another won't see
One won't speak di-fiddle-dum-dee
Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.

I asked one monkey, what don't you see?
"I don't see injustice, nor do I see pain.
The world is good for everyone like me.
No one else matters:
I won't see difference,
I won't see anyone who is different -
They are not worth my seeing."

Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.
One won't hear and another won't see
One won't speak di-fiddle-dum-dee
Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.

I asked the second monkey, what don't you hear?
"I don't hear opinions that are different to my own.
I don't hear anything to challenge me or my thinking.
I simply know I am right -
Anything else is lies,
I know my truth
So I just won't listen"

Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.
One won't hear and another won't see
One won't speak di-fiddle-dum-dee
Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.

I asked the third monkey, what don't you say?
"I don't say anything that may cause harm -
Harm to my relationships even when the truth must be said.
I won't speak of difference
Because everything must be harmonious
Even when it causes pain;
Of anything else, I just won't speak."

Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.
One won't hear and another won't see
One won't speak di-fiddle-dum-dee

Three wise monkeys swinging in a tree.

-EL

The Hope of Forgiveness

Introduction

Forgiveness is surely one of the most abused concepts in Christianity; with all too much frequency people are told they should, even must, forgive those who have hurt them. What does this mean for the abused child, the survivor of a concentration camp, or even those who were tortured both in their home countries and when seeking refuge in Australia? Yet forgiveness forms one of the central concepts within Christianity, and indeed, the understanding that humans can be and are forgiven and hence reconciled to God is one of the key differences between Christianity and other religions.

In spite of the centrality of forgiveness, virtually nothing has been written linking forgiveness to hope. A search of major databases¹ using the key words of “hope” and “forgiveness” revealed no relevant writing linking these concepts. Even though Moltmann writes a little about forgiveness, he does so with a very different emphasis to the advocates’ reflections. It is the nuances in these reflections and their connection to hope that will be explored in this chapter.

Forgiveness in Moltmann

Forgiveness is about creating a new beginning for those involved and therefore it is somewhat surprising, in the light of Moltmann’s emphasis on eschatology, that he rarely writes about the meaning of forgiveness. Indeed, the times when he does is only in relation to God forgiving humanity.² Perhaps this is because of his context as being identified amongst the oppressive systems— not only as a German living in the

¹ Databases searched were Proquest (<http://0-proquest.umi.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/pqdweb>), Academic OneFile (<http://0-find.galegroup.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/itx/start.do?prodId= AONE&userGroupName= murdoch&finalAuth= true>) and Atla Religion Database (<http://0-web.ebscohost.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/ehost/search?vid=1&hid=105&sid=94fc34dc-1f89-4804-816e-e1714cfb3d47%40sessionmgr111>)

² For example in Moltmann, *Crucified God* there are eight references to forgiveness all of which discuss forgiveness by God. Similar results are found in searching others of Moltmann’s books.

generation who fought in the Second World War, but also as a white, male from the first world. Yet at the same time, Moltmann experienced the sense of forgiveness in the aftermath of the Second World War which has been suggested gave him a special sensitivity to suffering.³ Indeed, as a prisoner of war in England, he was gifted with an education which enabled him to return home to eventually study for his doctorate.⁴

Moltmann suggests that forgiveness is not so much about the guilt itself, but rather “the new life to which [God] desires to awaken the guilty.”⁵ At the same time, this freedom from guilt is only one side of forgiveness. Moltmann asks, “how can we be free, not only of the evil we have committed, but of the evil we have suffered, and cannot forget because it has left traces in body and soul?”⁶ In many ways, it is this freedom from the effects of experiencing evil which is the benefit to those who need to forgive the perpetrator instead of being bound up in hatred, anger or bitterness about what has been. Forgiveness frees the individuals from their past in order to build a new future.

For those who perpetrate evil, Moltmann sees a need for atonement, although he acknowledges that this is often insufficient for what has been committed.⁷ Connected to this need for atonement is the concept of repentance or conversion. Moltmann argues that “in the Bible... repentance means ‘con-version’, an ‘about turn’. And this turn is *a turn to the future*.”⁸ Repentance also needs to look towards the future, although it acknowledges the past hurts. Thus new beginnings are needed not only for those who have been the victims of violence, but also for those who have instigated that violence; both groups need the liberation from their situations in order to create a new and just existence.

³ Haynes. *Prospects*, p. 109

⁴ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 32ff

⁵ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 75

⁶ Ibid., p. 53

⁷ Moltmann. *God for a secular society*, p. 187

⁸ Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 24

Forgiveness from those who are hurt

Whilst only a small number of advocates spoke of forgiveness, those who did had been challenged in their understandings of the concept by the actions of the refugees and asylum seekers. With advocates and refugees negotiating relationships across languages, cultures and religions, forgiveness was frequently needed as mistakes were made, some of which had the potential to offend each other. Frances related:

One of the good things about all these people is how forgiving they are when people like me make mistakes which can be quite embarrassing. I can't give any examples now, but they're just so forgiving. And because, I think, they can see that there's mutual trust, and that you're doing your best for them. It's quite amazing.

Over time, small blunders can accumulate and threaten to destroy relationships, yet the willingness with which advocates and refugees forgave each other for these difficulties enabled trust and relationships to develop.

However, the concept of forgiveness was challenged on an interfaith level. Another advocate reflected on the differences in understanding of forgiveness between Christianity and Islam,⁹ particularly with what this meant for humanity's relationship with God. Some of the Muslim refugees and asylum seekers had an understanding of Islam which meant that they could not be forgiven, even for accidental transgressions. Rev'd Kathleen reflecting on what she had learnt from Mahmud's understanding of Islam said:

There is no forgiveness in Islam, or not the Islam that he believed in. For instance, one Christmas time someone cooked, well made, rum-balls, put them in the fridge, didn't label them and he accidentally took a bite. And a good Muslim, a clean person would not have anything to do with alcohol. "Well God knows it's not your fault." "Well I'll just have to work harder to be a good Muslim." "Don't you have any understanding that God understands?" "No, I'll

⁹ When I refer to "Islam" it is important to note that this really relates to Islam as the advocates related the refugees' understanding. Like most other religions, Islam has a wide variety of interpretations and no one can be considered the correct one. However, it must also be noted that many of the asylum seekers and refugees were fleeing from fundamentalist Islam and therefore this would have coloured their views on many of the concepts discussed.

just have to work really hard.” I’m not someone who enjoyed reading Paul, I’m not someone who is hugely into the sin and guilt and humans are so awful that we can’t do anything without God. I have a fairly high view of humanity, in spite of all this stuff, but it made me realise how much even so, even how much I just take an understanding of grace for granted.

According to Rev’d Kathleen’s understanding of Mahmud’s faith he did not believe in forgiveness from God and the expectation was one of having to earn God’s favour rather than being able to put a mistake behind him and move on.

It could easily be expected that such an understanding would lead to reluctance to forgive other people. It has frequently been noted by theologians that one’s image of God affects how one treats other people;¹⁰ however, the same refugee who did not believe he could be forgiven for accidentally eating alcohol, sent a gift to the then Minister for Immigration on his release. Rev’d Kathleen related:

I understand politically wanting to make connections, but he was wanting to show forgiveness. So for someone who wasn’t expecting to experience forgiveness from God, he was still willing to offer it.

Yet, for at least some Muslims, forgiveness is from other humans and needs to be asked from those whom one has hurt.¹¹ To seek absolution from ordained ministry, or even God, risks creating cheap forgiveness that does not call the lives of offenders into account. On the other hand, other advocates also spoke of this willingness to offer forgiveness in spite of the depth of hurt. Caroline asked Jacob, a Christian refugee who had been tortured in his country of origin, what it meant to forgive the perpetrators of the torture:

He said forgiveness was handing things back to God and telling him to deal with that person because I couldn’t do it... It was a real definition of forgiveness because you hadn’t gone on wearing the hate. He admitted that he didn’t know how he would cope if he came face to face with that person, but he just handed it over. [Caroline]

¹⁰ Such as in Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Introducing redemption in Christian feminism*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), p. 74

¹¹ This concept was expressed to me by a Muslim refugee who moved from her homeland as a child.

Even those who did not talk about forgiveness explored the connected issue of grace. Grace is an undeserved gift,¹² so it could be argued that forgiveness is one of the greatest acts of grace. Certainly, whilst perpetrators can repent and make reparation, forgiveness itself is not of their making. There are no actions that can make one “worthy” of forgiveness or force another to forgive, since it is about dealing with the past. Hence, to be offered forgiveness is a grace.

The advocates expressed grace as something which occurred on both sides of the relationship. Some spoke of the experiences of grace from their own point of view; others reflected on what it meant in the stories shared with them by asylum seekers.

With the system being so harsh on asylum seekers, moments of grace stood out:

That was the ruling, but Geoff Gallop was the Premier at the time, and there was a deputation went to Geoff Gallop and explained to him what the problem was. These people wanted to learn English, but they couldn’t enrol in TAFE because they didn’t have a Visa. And so he said, “This isn’t right, but I can’t change the law, but they can go to TAFE, they’re allowed to go to TAFE but they can’t get an official certificate to say they’ve done the course.” So many, many of them did go to TAFE to learn English and it was sort of undercover in a way.
[Barbara]

The importance of grace must be understood in the context of the harshness of the detention system, and why it had the potential to change people’s understandings of their faith. For those who were in detention, the experience of having people who cared for them, although they were strangers, was challenging to their understanding of their faith. Sarah reflected:

One of the comments that one of the Muslims made was that they had to come to Australia and be cared for by Christians to understand what Islam is.

For this refugee the learning was about the difference between what is written in the Scriptures and what is actually practiced. His experiences of Christian supporters shed new light on his understanding of the writings of Islam.

¹² Donald K. McKim. *Westminster dictionary of theological terms*. 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) “grace”

Other advocates spoke of the grace they experienced from refugees, particularly when in many ways advocates can be identified with the system which is causing the problems. One advocate spoke of visiting a refugee camp in Africa:

She [a refugee in the camp] said how can those white people call themselves Christians? I was very shocked at first. And afterwards I realised that she didn't say, "How can you call yourselves Christians" because I was there [Rev'd Tom]

The grace for Rev'd Tom was that this refugee woman was able to differentiate between his actions and the lack of actions of those in affluent countries which had left her suffering. For many advocates grace also meant seeing the goodness in people, particularly those whom society shuns. This perhaps connects to the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, which was a common motif in the advocate's theological reflections. Larry saw it as an explicit example of how Christians are called to behave towards those who are suffering. Betty affirmed:

There's always beauty in the human being. Even in the jail, there you can always find something beautiful, you can. You can always find compassion, I suppose. It's just a lot more difficult.

Rev'd Steve also explored this concept and related an incident when he was working in an African refugee camp. He had taken some aid to a woman, who had given him food in return, although it had represented her family's dinner. He described this incident of being ministered to by a woman in extreme poverty as an example of a "life changing moment of grace."

Grace was not only offered by the detainees, but also in many ways by advocates themselves. It was the gift of a reciprocal relationship between advocates and asylum seekers. Not only were advocates working against the system to create a gift of a humane environment, but asylum seekers were also working against the system in developing their relationships with advocates.

You know, I can see what you're giving them, but what are they giving you? And I think they're giving me the great gift of trust. Where they've come from situations where all of them, I'd say, without exception are in situations where

they haven't been able to trust anybody much and they've left their country, very often without telling anybody. And you know escaped literally against the law and against all sorts of obstacles, they don't trust anybody. [Frances]

Grace and forgiveness, as we have seen, were integral to the building and development of on-going relationships between asylum seekers and advocates. The advocates who heard stories of asylum seekers and refugees offering forgiveness, found their faith challenged and in particular were forced to rethink how they viewed forgiveness in the Christian context.

Towards a Hopeful theology of Forgiveness

Whilst both Moltmann and some of advocates talked about forgiveness in connection to hope, their nuances were significantly different. Moltmann explores hope as bringing new life to the guilty,¹³ whereas those advocates who explored issues of forgiveness did so without any need for the offender to recognise his or her guilt. Indeed, most of the anecdotes of asylum seekers forgiving those caught up in the system related to people who continued to be involved in the system and in a very public way continued to deny their guilt.

The concept of forgiving someone who does not recognise his or her guilt has the potential to be easily misused. This certainly could relate to the traditional concept of forgiveness, particularly in the light of what is often interpreted as the biblical injunction for limitless forgiveness.¹⁴ However, one must ask whether such an injunction really applies to people who are systematically victimised over an extended period. It is, therefore, the connection between forgiveness and reconciliation which may help illuminate how forgiveness is relevant to asylum seekers and refugees.

¹³ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 75

¹⁴ For example in J. K. Grider, "Forgiveness", in *Evangelical dictionary of theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984) Also found in biblical passages such as Matthew 18:22 that speaks of forgiving "seventy-seven times" i.e. a limitless number of times

The connection between forgiveness and reconciliation is disputable. Some authors see the two as synonymous,¹⁵ whereas others explicitly deny any intrinsic link between the two concepts.¹⁶ However, in the case of asylum seekers who forgave the guards or even their torturers in their home countries for their actions, no such reconciliation can take place because there is no continuing relationship. For the refugee who forgave the then Minister of Immigration, there was no personal relationship in the first place. Rather the Minister, who was far removed from the situation, continued to be responsible for his welfare and to be negligent in this. To link reconciliation as a necessary part of forgiveness would by definition exclude such examples and therefore it is my argument that reconciliation *can* be part of forgiveness, but it does not need to be. Forgiveness is still able to occur even when there is no possibility of reconciliation. Perhaps then, it is more accurate to say that forgiveness is not synonymous with reconciliation, but rather opens the possibility for the latter to occur.

If reconciliation is excluded as a necessary part of a definition of forgiveness, the issue remains as to what forgiveness actually is. From a human point of view, the reflection of Jacob that forgiveness involves handing back the hurts to God has two strengths to it. Firstly it allows for dealing with hurts that are so deep that it is not humanly possible to forgive. Although the hurt and pain may continue to be on-going from the incidents that call for forgiveness, it allows for a sense of closure for the victim, even if the perpetrator does not know about this. The need for “closure” is often observed in our contemporary world,¹⁷ and perhaps this sense of “handing over to God” is a healthier method of achieving this than minimising the pain or seeking revenge.

¹⁵ For example, James Dallen, "Forgiveness", in *The new dictionary of Catholic spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993)

¹⁶ For example, B. H. Childs, "Forgiveness", in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990)

¹⁷ I am reflecting here on the frequency with which on the news at the end of a court case a victim is interviewed and says “this has brought closure, I can move on now” and I am personally questioning

Secondly, “handing over to God” acknowledges the role of God in forgiveness. This means that when the victim continues to struggle with the hurt and pain of past events, there is not also the added burden of guilt for feeling unable to forgive. Even with the best intentions, there are hurts that are so deep they continue to reverberate in lives and small events can trigger memories of those experiences.¹⁸ This, of course, does not mean the victim has not forgiven the perpetrator, but rather what the perpetrator has done inevitably remains part of their life experience. This on-going effect is illustrated most clearly in the case of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a disorder with which many of the refugees and asylum seekers have to deal. There are times when small events can trigger overwhelming memories of traumatic events.¹⁹ Whilst PTSD is an extreme example, it must be noted that flashbacks can occur with less traumatic experiences. Forgiveness is therefore about not allowing such past experiences to continue to affect daily life, ideally for both the victim and perpetrator.

However, it must be noted that the connection between forgiveness and hope is both a theological and a pastoral issue. For those who have offered or accepted forgiveness, it means that the past no longer continues to alter the ways in which the oppressed person experience the world and can even bring healing to relationships and systems.²⁰ As to those who accept forgiveness, remorse for the past should also mean a change of behaviour for the future. Linn et al. do not view forgiveness as a passive response to oppression, rather they argue that by working through the stages of grief, one can arrive at a position wherein positive action can be taken which changes the situation for both the victim and perpetrator. They suggest that it is through listening to the internal voice

whether that sense of closure is more about having an official attribution of blame. As I am writing this, there were recently several news articles where these comments were made on the ABC Online (www.abc.net.au/news)

¹⁸ Kaplan, Sadock, and Grebb. *Synopsis of psychiatry*, p. 606

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 608

²⁰ Linn, Linn, and Linn. *Don't forgive too soon : extending the two hands that heal*, p. 32

underlying the initial response one is able to identify what is truly desired and determine a positive action that can be taken to amend the situation.²¹

Yet for asylum seekers, in most cases positive action led to further victimisation. An advocate cited examples where asylum seekers were specifically targeted because they had attempted to take positive action:

He had never been in the management unit, but then one day when he was trying to defend a friend who the guards were attacking and dragging him away, he said he's OK, he's going through a bit of a hard time, he was trying to be gentle with them. So they came back and took him and some others to the management unit. [Gloria]

Under such circumstances, even Linns' radical definition of forgiveness does not seem to apply. Perhaps then, the offering of forgiveness is more to do with not allowing past hurts to continue to impact upon the present, particularly on relationships with other people. For many of the asylum seekers there was no possibility of mending the relationship as Linn suggest. However, without addressing the issues involved, in the example given by Gloria of power and control, trauma can continue to affect other relationships and thus continue to reverberate through life.

Between Moltmann and the advocates, there seems to be two sides to the coin. Moltmann talks about receiving forgiveness, which can be constructed in more traditional terms, whereas advocates discuss the offering of forgiveness by the offended party. Although these concepts interact, they are not both necessarily present. Being forgiven does, as Moltmann points out, bring new life to the guilty. It calls forth a change in behaviour and, as traditional theology maintains, requires recognition of guilt.²² Yet, for the offended party, forgiveness involves letting go of that which affects relationships, not only with the offended party, but also with other people. It is through this double action of forgiveness, given and received, that hope is generated on both

²¹ Ibid., p. 43

²² Grider, "Forgiveness"

sides for a new beginning, not only with God or the offended party, but also with humanity. Neither the victim nor the perpetrator needs to continue to play the roles into which they have been cast by past actions and therefore they are free to be truly themselves. Not every perpetrator will take up the offer of forgiveness, but those who do are able to recognise their past wrongs and restore relationships, if not with the victim, then certainly with others who have been or might have been affected by the ongoing impact of the perpetrator's actions. Forgiveness offers both the hope and the possibility that life can be different to that which is experienced in the present. Thus the actions of asylum seekers, as related by advocates, not only demonstrate a model of forgiveness which connects with hope, but also this can be generalised into examining forgiveness for a variety of situations.

However, a further aspect still needs to be addressed and that is the question as to why there is the connection between hope and forgiveness. The connection is more than simply the offer of a new beginning for both the perpetrator and the victim. In a conversation that I had with a survivor of torture I raised the issue of the connection between these concepts and the fact that Moltmann had not written about the links. The survivor differentiated between the two concepts saying that forgiveness deals with the now whereas hope looks towards the future: when one is coping with the effects of torture, the now is what is important. This could well be a starting point for thinking about the connections. It is only through dealing with the now, that we can look towards the future; forgiveness aims to deal with past hurts and therefore enables the survivor to hope for the future.

Whilst this point is valid and useful, the connection between hope and forgiveness is more than a continuum. Whether or not it is recognised at the time, forgiveness is in itself an act of hope. This view of forgiveness recognises that even the perpetrator is the

beloved of God and hence treats the perpetrator as such. It recognises in the perpetrator the potential to grow and change regardless of whether he/she does so for him/her self.

At the same time, forgiveness names the wrongs, which is a necessary step towards enacting the future reign of God. It is not so much about minimising past hurts as seeking to use those hurts creatively in order to generate a new future for all concerned. Naming the evils is a necessary part of the process. There are actions of humans that cannot simply be swept away; the torture experienced by many of the asylum seekers is one such example. Through naming events as evil, a victim is able to recognise that such events were in no way his/her fault. It also allows victims to take control of their reactions. However, forgiveness enables the humanity of the perpetrator to be recognised and by so doing reduces the risk of dehumanising them and seeking revenge. Revenge simply perpetuates the cycle of violence that can occur where one party does not recognise the other as fully human; forgiveness breaks this cycle and allows for a new beginning. Where a continuing relationship occurs, forgiveness enables the development of creative solutions which can change that relationship in order to create a new future for all concerned.

Forgiveness is essential to Christianity and it brings hope on both sides of the equation. Yet care must be taken that it does not become an obligation that is used to further abuse the hurt, but rather that it is part of the healing process. Being able to forgive can free both victim and perpetrator from the past in order to recreate a new future. This does not necessarily mean the development of a relationship, particularly where one did not exist prior to the events requiring forgiveness. However, it does mean that although those events may inform the future, they no longer determine it. One further theme remains for discussion in this thesis that of the relationship of God to speaking about suffering and hope. The next section will explore some significant aspects of potential understandings of God in a suffering world.

Encountering God



The Suffering God
Relationship in God
Hope from God
Reign of God

Unaccompanied means they haven't got a guardian, so the guardian still becomes the Minister for Immigration. So the guardian was Amanda Vanstone, which was a running joke. We joked about how we would write letters to her and ask her, get the refugees to say "Mum, I need money for text books for school, could you cook me dinner tonight." The minister then delegated responsibility to the Department of Community Services [DOCS]. So they had a DOCS worker, and that DOCS worker had 40 or so, so that's a lot, so guys like this guy were living in a flat with a few other young guys too who were maybe just over 18 and he wasn't so his DOCS worker was really his only support. So once he hit 18, DOCS can't really do much, but it doesn't mean that he can't really, I mean, he's got friends, but they aren't really in a position to... I'm not sure how many of them were, but we had two, the other one was, both of them were with just groups of young guys. Obviously, there was regular contact from the DOCS, but DOCS being DOCS were massively overstretched. And the reason the project started was because the DOCS worker who was lovely and really well intentioned, who burnt out pretty soon after the project finished, was staying back 'til like 9 o'clock at night to help these kids with their homework.

Virginia

The Suffering God

Introduction

The location of God when people are suffering has long been a theological debate. Traditionally, God has been viewed as absent in suffering or even inflicting the suffering in order to purify sinners.¹ However, more recently this has been deconstructed and other views of God and suffering have emerged. Is God present *in* suffering or *in spite of* suffering? What is said in answer to this question reflects upon the understanding of the nature of God. The answer also illustrates how God is understood to be active in a world in which such suffering and evil can occur. To see God as present in spite of suffering implies a God who would prefer not to be there. God in suffering affirms that the experience of God includes suffering and that God is fully engaged with the suffering ones of the world.

If these presumptions are correct, then the advocates' experiences of God while visiting the immigration detention centres will deepen the answer to the question of where God is in suffering. With such evil being deliberately inflicted upon asylum seekers, how can it be possible to still talk of a good and loving God? This chapter explores the various locations for God when suffering occurs and seeks to further develop a theology of God in suffering.

Christ the Representative

Before exploring Sölle's views on the nature of God, it is worth detailing her deconstruction of the traditional views of God, particularly in relation to God being all powerful. It was in the aftermath of the Second World War, and particularly of Auschwitz, that Sölle could no longer reconcile a powerful image of God with the

¹ Elaine Claire Ledgerwood, "Saints not sinners: An investigation into the "positive" constructions of disability by the historical church." *Colloquium* 42, no. 1 (2010), p. 93ff

events in the world.² Graham notes that this was the primary motive in Sölle's re-examination of "the doctrine of God."³ Indeed Sölle frequently questions, "Why do people worship a God whose supreme quality is power, not justice; whose interest lies in subjection, not mutuality; who fears equality?"⁴ Sölle equates the worship of such a god with the worship of power,⁵ and it has been argued that seeing God as a "great magician" allows humans to distance themselves from their responsibility for their actions.⁶

This worshiping of a God of power has several outcomes in the way in which society functions and its theology. Firstly, "the two propositions that God is both almighty and just lead to the conclusion that all suffering has to be punishment for sin."⁷ This creates what Sölle describes as a "sadistic perspective"⁸ in which God inflicts suffering on humans. It also serves to disempower people from alleviating their own suffering or the suffering of others.

Secondly, by worshiping a God of power and domination, authoritarian rule among humanity is justified.⁹ Sölle argues that the Old Testament concept of obedience is limited by an injunction for the rulers to act justly and that "under no circumstances is it related to the ruler in a completely authoritarian manner."¹⁰ The concept of God as a

² Sölle. *Strength of the weak*, p. 98

³ Graham. *Representation and substitution*, p. 24

⁴ Dorothee Sölle. *Creative disobedience*. Translated by Lawrence W. Denef. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995), p. xiv; Sölle. *Window of vulnerability*, p. 70

⁵ Sölle. *Strength of the weak*, p. 111

⁶ Andrea Bieler, "The language of prayer between truth telling and mysticism," in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 58

⁷ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 24

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sölle. *Creative disobedience*, p. 19

¹⁰ Ibid.

“super-power” is directly rejected by Sölle.¹¹ Indeed, according to Oliver, Sölle argues this concept of an omnipotent God is dead.¹²

Alongside Sölle’s deconstruction of the traditional view of God as omnipotent, she also deconstructs the view of God as being apathetic. Without God being able to suffer, Sölle argues that God cannot also love:

What I do know is that pain is part of life because pain is part of love. I do not wish to have a God free of pain, for I could not trust such a God.¹³

If, as Oliver points out, Sölle sees Christ as the way “God is embodied in the world,”¹⁴ then for Sölle God *must* be able to suffer and love. She argues that the impact of worshipping a deity who does not suffer is that this is imitated in humanity and “the more a person draws himself back, the smaller he makes himself, the greater his chances of remaining free from suffering.”¹⁵ Thus, humans become disconnected from themselves and each other in their attempts to avoid suffering. Sölle does not say, but in this implies, that a deity free from suffering would necessarily be similarly withdrawn from relationships with others.

As previously mentioned, it was because of the suffering in the Second World War that Sölle was drawn to the image of Christ as the one who knew what it was to suffer. In one of her early books Sölle writes:

Only here on the cross, does Christ identify himself with the fears and the suffering of those whom God has forsaken, with the sin of those who have forgotten God and with the destruction of the world, which is the inner logic of this sin.¹⁶

¹¹ Sölle. *Death by bread alone*, p. 133

¹² Oliver, “*Christ in the world*,” p. 115

¹³ Sölle. *Against the wind*, p. 77

¹⁴ Oliver, “*Christ in the world*,” p. 124

¹⁵ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 43

¹⁶ Sölle. *Christ the representative*, p. 126

At this point she still maintains the identification of the suffering Christ over and against an omnipotent God. In her later work, as we have already seen, this distinction between God and the Christ who suffers becomes more blurred.

God is not in heaven; he is hanging on the cross. Love is not an otherworldly, intruding, self-asserting power – and to meditate on the cross can mean to take leave of that dream.¹⁷

By the end of her life, Sölle wrote of “God’s pain,”¹⁸ and she removed the distinction she had previously had between God and Christ. Indeed, she speaks of the cross as “a symbol of the love of life in justice. It expresses that love for the endangered, threatened life of God in our world.”¹⁹ God therefore, according to Sölle, can experience suffering and be threatened by situations which oppress people.

Without God being able to suffer, God becomes a mere spectator and “is no better than a cruel torturer from the perspective of victims.”²⁰ Sölle acknowledges this and argues that God is in the midst of the suffering:

God is no executioner – and no almighty spectator (which would amount to the same thing). God is not the mighty tyrant. Between the sufferer and the one who causes the suffering, between the victim and the executioner, God, whatever people make of this word, is on the side of the sufferer. God is on the side of the victim, he is hanged.²¹

However, even if God experiences suffering, this has little comfort for those who are oppressed if God is still removed from their situation. For Sölle, the identification of God with the suffering ones of the world is so important that she was able to affirm, “The despised messiah of the Christians, however, proves himself to be God’s elect precisely by suffering.”²² Through maintaining both God’s presence in the midst of

¹⁷ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 148

¹⁸ Sölle. *Theology for skeptics*, p. 71-72

¹⁹ Dorothee Sölle. *The truth is concrete*. Translated by Dinah Livingstone. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 103-104

²⁰ Sarah Katherine Pinnock, “A postmodern response to suffering after Auschwitz,” in *The theology of Dorothee Sölle*, ed. Sarah Katherine Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 134

²¹ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 106-107

²² Sölle. *Christ the representative*, p. 71

suffering and God's suffering with the poor and oppressed Sölle reconciles the concept of God with the suffering that occurs in the world.

Suffering Love

Moltmann also frequently argues for the necessity of God's experiencing of suffering. He suggests, "A God who by reason of his essence cannot suffer, cannot suffer with us either, or even feel sympathy."²³ Thus, for Moltmann, the experience of suffering is a necessary adjunct to other characteristics which are attributed to God such as love and compassion. Indeed, as Bauckham suggests, Moltmann's view is that "only if we say that God himself was involved in the suffering of Christ on the cross can we do justice to the place of the cross in Christian faith."²⁴ He suggests that without the capacity to suffer, God would "at most be capable of loving himself."²⁵ Whilst traditionally the only two options for suffering were either "an essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful subjection to suffering,"²⁶ Moltmann argues instead for a third perspective: "Active suffering, the willingness to open oneself to be touched – moved – affected by something other than oneself; and that means the suffering of passionate love."²⁷ For Moltmann, God essentially suffers because of God's love and God is able to love because God also suffers.

Additionally, the suffering of each member of the Trinity is then integral to Moltmann's understanding of how God participates in the suffering of the world. However, it is also his focus on the Trinity and the differentiation between how each member experiences suffering which is the primary difference between how Moltmann and Sölle view the suffering of God. Moltmann is concerned to avoid patripassianism and yet at the same

²³ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 70

²⁴ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 15

²⁵ Jurgen Moltmann. *The trinity and the Kingdom of God: The doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 23

²⁶ Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 44

²⁷ Ibid.

time maintain that God actually experienced the suffering of the cross. Bauckham sees this concern leading to “God taking sides against himself” with those who suffer.²⁸ If Bauckham is correct in this interpretation of Moltmann’s theology then this appears to be a dysfunctional trait of God.

The story of Christ’s suffering on the cross is a central story of Christianity: Moltmann agrees with this, but extends the concept and argues that it must have meaning and connect with the suffering of each member. Indeed, Moltmann goes as far as to argue, “If God is incapable of suffering, then – if we are to be consistent – Christ’s passion can only be viewed as a human tragedy.”²⁹ Yet, it is not only God and Christ who suffer, but also the Spirit. Moltmann argues for the suffering of the Spirit starting from his thesis that “the history of Jesus is simultaneously the history of the Spirit.”³⁰ Yet, at the same time Moltmann also maintains that, “The Spirit does not suffer in the same way, for he [sic] is Jesus’ strength in suffering, and is even the ‘indestructible life’ in whose power Jesus can give himself vicariously ‘for many’.”³¹ Thus, Moltmann sees the Spirit’s suffering as arising from its presence with Jesus during the crucifixion.

That God suffered is, for Moltmann, essential to the engagement of God in the world. God’s presence with the suffering Jesus “demonstrated the power of God as prevenient love to the powerless and outcasts.”³² This then, is the “suffering which the love for the other brings him.”³³ Even more than this, the reality that God suffers with the people means for Moltmann there is a “power which saves the persecuted people from despair and paralysis, and keeps its assailed and disappointed hope alive.”³⁴ Because God suffers with the persecuted people of the world, they can hold onto their hope for a

²⁸ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 89

²⁹ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 22

³⁰ Moltmann. *The Spirit of life*, p. 64

³¹ Ibid.

³² Moltmann. *Coming of God*, p. 87

³³ Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 45

³⁴ Moltmann. *The Spirit of life*, p. 28

different future. Not only does this mean that Christ brings “divine justice and righteousness,”³⁵ but it also means “the identification of the victims with God, so that they are put under God’s protection and with him are given their rights of which they have been deprived by human beings.”³⁶ Thus, God’s preference for the poor gives the poor and persecuted reason to hope in spite of their situation. Is this solidarity sufficient for those who suffer? There are authors who in reflecting on Moltmann’s theology see that this question has not yet adequately addressed the problem of suffering.³⁷

Christ of the Sinners

The identification of God with Jesus of Nazareth is for Moltmann central to his focus on liberation for the poor and the oppressed. Not only was Jesus’ message one of grace to the “sinners and tax collectors”,³⁸ but also he “ceased to be a prophet in the succession of Moses”,³⁹ and thus was necessarily at odds with the Jewish establishment. Moltmann sees that Jesus’ focus on grace not judgement also meant that the reign of God must be “anticipate[d] in one’s self”,⁴⁰ by living out the “unconditional and free grace of God”.⁴¹ Thus, the life of Jesus was essentially one of “community with the outcasts”.⁴²

It is this conflict between his contemporaries’ understanding of the Law of Moses and the preaching and actions of Jesus’ life which led to his death.⁴³ Yet this condemnation of Jesus deconstructs the tradition of God as all-powerful. Rather than seeing God in the powerful rulers of the earth, Moltmann argues that God is present in the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 131

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 88

³⁸ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 129

³⁹ Ibid., p. 128

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 129

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jürgen Moltmann. *The experiment hope*. Translated by M. Douglas Meeks. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 67

⁴³ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 131

vulnerability of the cross.⁴⁴ Thus alongside the humiliation of the historical Jesus, Moltmann argues that God too was present. However, it must be noted that at the same time this is in tension with Moltmann's view of Jesus being abandoned by God on the cross.

Absence of God

Moltmann's focus on the absence of God during the crucifixion perhaps reflects his own experience of the absence of God during the firebombing of Hamburg, a night that seems pivotal in the development of his theology. Reflecting on those experiences, he writes, "My question was not 'why does God allow this to happen?' but, 'my God, where are you?'".⁴⁵ It was the connection between his questions and the death cry of Jesus on the cross which enabled Moltmann to summon "the courage to live again."⁴⁶ At that point, the concept of Christ understanding suffering and abandonment because he had also experienced suffering and abandonment meant that the Christian gospel made sense to the young Moltmann.⁴⁷ Müller-Farenholtz suggests it is because of this starting point that Moltmann's theology retains a questioning nature throughout his later work.⁴⁸

Moltmann's theology of the cross argues that Jesus was *abandoned* by God on the cross so that the godless can be saved.⁴⁹ It is through this abandonment that God experiences the suffering of Jesus' death and it is done in order that there may be redemption.⁵⁰ It is through this abandonment of Jesus on the cross that there is "solidarity with all who

⁴⁴ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 68

⁴⁵ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 17

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30

⁴⁷ Moltmann. *God for a secular society*, p. 172

⁴⁸ Geiko Müller-Farenholtz. *The kingdom and the power: The theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. (London: SCM Press, 2000), p. 19

⁴⁹ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 242

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 242 -243

suffer apparently abandoned by God.”⁵¹ Moltmann sees this forsakenness and death as essential: “Only if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself, is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election and divine life.”⁵² Thus, for Moltmann, the cross, and in particular the abandonment of Jesus on the cross is a necessity in order for God to reconcile sinners with Godself.

For Moltmann, the question of the presence of God in suffering is more important than why suffering is allowed to occur. He suggests that people who ask why “have the impression that God is a cold blind force of destiny... because they are afraid of becoming like that themselves.”⁵³ This may not be a fair analysis of those who raise issues of justice in the world, yet it does also highlight concepts of theodicy which promote resignation. Moltmann suggests that asking about theodicy is “an onlooker’s question”;⁵⁴ those in the midst of suffering ask where God is in their experiences.⁵⁵ That Christ on the cross cried out in feelings of abandonment is for Moltmann “either the end of every theology and every religion, or it is the beginning of a truly Christian theology - and that means a liberating theology”.⁵⁶ Bauckham sees Moltmann’s interpretation of this cry as Jesus’ rejection by God.⁵⁷ Yet, of course, the crucifixion was not the final word; the abandonment of Jesus by God is superseded by the resurrection.

God in Detention

Where was God in the detention centres? This question was asked of all the advocates who visited immigration detention and virtually all spoke of experiencing God in the

⁵¹ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 86

⁵² Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 246

⁵³ Moltmann. *God for a secular society*, p. 172

⁵⁴ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 34

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. x

⁵⁷ Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 58

work that they did with refugees and asylum seekers, even when they were visiting the detention centres. For the majority God was most certainly present in detention, in spite of the abuse and hardship that was inflicted on the detainees. However, Ruth was different and she emphatically stated that God was:

Not in Villawood. I mean I do get angry at Villawood. I see the face of unkind guards, you know, I always get so, I do get angry with the government, I get angry with government policies. There is so much that doesn't need to happen and you just I mean, I've talked to some people who have done refugee work for 2 or 3 or 4 years and they've just burnt out.

Yet as her reflection continued, she did concede:

But as for seeing God at Villawood, No, I think, I know God is there and God is with a number of people who are looking for God and seeking God. Need the help. And probably if they asked, would find him, her, it, God.

With the deliberate and systematic mistreatment of asylum seekers, other advocates initially said it was hard to see God in the detention centres. Later, on further reflection, they related instances where they had experienced God's presence in spite of the suffering they saw inflicted on their fellow humans.

So it was the company that they really need because they were detainees and then like I feel that sometimes God is not there, like God, how these people are suffering and then like sometimes they're treated like animals. They are given a number not a name. Like the cattle are numbered. So I feel that it's really wrong and God has to look upon them, you know, that justice has to be done.
[Brenda]

The experience of God was different for each person. Whilst some advocates saw God as being there in pity, for other advocates it was the way that people responded to the suffering of asylum seekers which revealed the presence of God:

But the opportunity to see the power of God at work through people in suffering and pain, opening up avenues through the compassion of people working around them as well as the startling things that happened politically that year, for me, yes, here is God at work. [Rev'd Walter]

Although virtually all the advocates affirmed the presence of God in the detention centres, only a few advocates expressed their experience of God as being seen in the

face of the suffering people. Several referred to Matthew 25 and the parable wherein Jesus says “just as you did it to the least of these... you did it to me.” For these advocates, the face of the suffering people was the face of the suffering Christ.

I feel very close to Christ when I’m with people who are suffering... So there’s this incredible tension and ambiguity that we live with as Christians. I tell you what shocks me more than the evil that I’ve seen is the complacency of Christians. I find that very disturbing. We know what’s going on. I mean we know what’s going on and sometimes we help and sometimes we don’t. And Christ never became hardened but we have. [Rev’d Tom]

And the suffering is there and God comes in suffering. God comes with the good and the bad. God doesn’t, I don’t believe in a God of punishment. [Margaret]

For many advocates the image of God suffering with people was important in dealing with their experiences in the detention centres. That God is not removed from the world of suffering, is not impassible, was important in the reflections of some advocates:

So where is God in suffering? Have a look at Jesus Christ himself. There are no guarantees of a comfortable life, are there? [Joyce]

So where is God in the suffering? Right in the heart of it, I suppose, whatever that means. It’s the essence of Christianity that his own son, you know the suffering death and resurrection of his own son that for me it’s the beauty of Christianity, as opposed to what I’d consider any other religion, that God’s own son came down to us and it wasn’t a facade, it wasn’t a charade. [Rev’d Joe]

Because advocates saw God being present in the suffering, they viewed this as their call also to be involved with suffering people. This recognition is similar to that of seeing the face of Christ in the suffering people, yet it was not often expressed in those terms.

God still calls us to go and be where the hurt and suffering are. And we’re to seek Christ in them. [Rev’d Kathleen]

The concept of an interventionalist God was rejected by virtually all advocates.⁵⁸ Even so, a few advocates saw the potential for positive changes to come out of experiences of

⁵⁸ The term “interventionalist God” was one that was used by many of the advocates to describe the sort of God in which they did not believe. It generally refers to a concept of God where God actively intervenes in the world to punish sinners or set things right. The logical extension to this point of view is that suffering happens because it is the will of God. Because the advocates have used this term, I have chosen to do so here as well.

suffering. Interestingly, those who did, did not relate these changes to the experiences in detention centres, but rather gave historical examples.

You know, there is much more of a challenge. If, God was a rescuing kind of God, how could you ever have a Nelson Mandela? [Rev'd Don]

I would say that God's "use" is in calling attention to it, and subverting it. So the magnificat: the rich shall go away empty and the poor will be filled with good things: the whole beatitudes of turning everything upside-down: that's where I see God at work in the world through people. I won't say that miracles don't happen, but I don't think we can just pray, pray, pray, pray, pray and pray and do nothing else for a miracle. I think God calls us to be really active and work towards that subverting of the normal order of things. [Rev'd Kathleen]

It is also important to note that in contrast to some traditional theologies, advocates did not see suffering as being a sign of being separated from God. As has already been affirmed, God was experienced as being present in the detention centres and in the difficulties of the lives of the refugees. Betty reflected:

And God didn't send Jesus to suffer for us. I mean, were we ever separated from God? We were never separated from God.

For many advocates the image of the crucifixion or the Eucharist was important in dealing with the suffering they encountered in their work with refugees and asylum seekers: These symbols of Christ's suffering gave strength to advocates as they dealt with the brokenness of asylum seekers and refugees.

So this idea of the bread of life, that's a very important concept to me. And also, you know you're talking about saying a number of people have spoken of the significance of the cross. For me it's also the significance of the chalice and the thought that one of my private prayers is that I place all the suffering that I know of in my mind in the chalice with Christ's blood. It's a tremendous emotional release. [Rev'd Tom]

Where is God?

Moltmann's view of God's suffering, as discussed above, in many ways still separates God from the suffering of the world. The Father only suffers because the Father loves and love experiences suffering when the beloved is hurt. This could be described as sympathy rather than suffering in itself – such a view of the Father has no first-hand

experience in suffering except Christ in his Passion. Given that sympathy is based on the projections of one's own feelings onto the other in the other's situation,⁵⁹ could a God who has not experienced suffering other than the Passion really experience suffering in this way? It would seem that this understanding of God the Father who suffers because of the sympathy of love is at best projecting onto humanity and at worst is undertaking merely an intellectual pursuit in attempting to understand what the suffering is.

On the other hand, advocates saw God as experiencing the suffering first-hand in the detention centres and being there in spite of the suffering that was occurring. For many advocates, God was present to them in the suffering of the people whom they encountered; God was actually present and suffering with the people, rather than being, as Moltmann appears to argue, a God suffering out of sympathy. The image of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 may be helpful here, although few advocates used it specifically. In this parable it is understood that how one treats the poor and marginalised which highlights how one treats God: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."⁶⁰ Therefore, to take this concept seriously, in mistreating asylum seekers, it was God who was mistreated. God was more than present in spite of the suffering, God was there and being mistreated.

Sölle's thought is somewhere between the two. As previously noted, in her earlier life Sölle drew a distinction between God and Christ which led her to focus on the person of Christ; it was only in her later life that she began to see God as suffering, not the corresponding abandonment in the crucifixion, as Moltmann argued, but the actual pain of the Passion.

⁵⁹ Nancy Eisenberg, "Empathy", in *Encyclopedia of psychology*, ed. Alan E. Kazdin (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2000)

⁶⁰ Matthew 25: 40

For God to be anything other than a deity removed from the day to day suffering of the world, I would suggest that the concept of impassibility needs to be deconstructed as Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates attempt to do. However, in the light of the reflections of advocates, I do not believe that Moltmann's deconstruction is radical enough. The Father-God is still an observer in the drama of the world's suffering and this to me stands up to neither the experiences of asylum seekers in detention nor to the suffering of Auschwitz, which is primary to Moltmann's concern. Sölle's theology of God's suffering seems to me to be somewhat underdeveloped. Although she argues for both God's suffering and God's presence in the midst of the situation, this requires further expansion, which unfortunately she did not do.

Perhaps the best analogy for God's suffering in the world is the actions of advocates, particularly in the light of the trauma they experienced because of their involvement with visiting asylum seekers in detention. Advocates suffered not only out of sympathy from seeing their friends being deported and abused by the government system but also because occasionally they too became affected by the same harsh system in their lives, although to a lesser degree. Advocates, like the detainees, experienced the harshness of the guards, the threatening nature of the system and the breakdown of relationships because of what they were doing. It was because they chose to journey with asylum seekers and refugees that they experienced their trauma. Yet they also chose to continue in this work because of their relationship with asylum seekers, for in doing so there was the glimmer of hope which breaking down isolation brings.

To take a somewhat panentheistic view, God is present in journeying alongside the suffering ones and experiences the suffering that is inflicted. God can experience the suffering not only because God is in relationship with those who are suffering but also because God is present and engaged in the lives of those who are suffering. As advocates mostly noted, God was already present in the detention centres before they

arrived; God was present with the people as they were mistreated by the guards. It is in this way that the Matthew 25 passage makes more sense: since God journeys with those who are suffering, what they experience, God experiences too.

God needs us

Traditionally the relationship between humanity and God is constructed in ways which depict people needing God, but Sölle turns this around and argues that God needs humans.⁶¹ When there are no people willing to be the friends of God in the world, Sölle sees that God is able to do little to change the situation for those who are suffering. Neither Moltmann nor advocates spoke of God needing humanity; although Moltmann sees that God wants a relationship with humanity,⁶² it must be acknowledged that needs and wants are different. The question still remains as to what this concept of God needing humanity contributes to advocates' understanding of who God is in the world of suffering.

Advocates, as has already been observed in chapter six, spoke of God as not being responsible for the evil occurring in the world and of the role of humanity in creating unjust systems. In many ways, Sölle's concept of God needing humanity connects strongly with seeing the face of Christ in the oppressed people of the world and the images of Matthew 25 discussed above. God needs humanity in the same way that asylum seekers and refugees needed advocates to stand alongside them and demonstrate love, through their actions, and alternative relationship.

Sölle, like the advocates, denies an interventionalist God, but rather argues that God makes God's intention known and calls on humanity to set it into action.⁶³ It is to this calling to action that advocates responded by making a difference wherever they could

⁶¹ Sölle. *Theology for skeptics*, p. 15

⁶² Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p 255

⁶³ Sölle. *Theology for skeptics*, p. 16

in the lives of asylum seekers. Certainly as advocates spoke of their motivations to engage with the refugees and asylum seekers, these concepts appeared.

So I guess it gave me the opportunity to show, like to show compassion and hope and faith to people who were really hoping for something like that, who really needed it, who hadn't experienced it so far in their dealings with people in Australia, much and just were very fearful of what the future might had. So it caused a lot of us to think about well, if we are here in our comfortable lives as Christians and God somehow has put us in this place at this time, well what does this mean for us? What is God calling us to do? It seems to be fairly obvious. Could we do it? What could we do? We're feeling so, we're just sort of normal people, inadequacy, we don't know how to go about it, we don't know what the future will hold, but we will just do what we can, step by step, so it's evolved.
[Janet]

Advocates saw themselves as simply responding to the needs which God put before them. Perhaps this is a more active image than that used by Sölle, but it does still connect to God relying on humanity and seeking a response.

Such a weak and vulnerable image of God is challenging to the traditional image of God as omnipotent and all powerful and provokes the question as to what "use" such a weak God is. Yet arguably to ask questions about the use of God is to descend into a materialistic view of religion. Drawing on Sölle's concept that humanity's relationship with God is a reciprocal relationship and acknowledging that such a relationship requires giving on both sides, the impact of this concept on contemporary Christianity could well be further explored. Unlike the ancient Greek concept of friendship as only being possible between those who are alike, this model allows for each of those involved in the relationship to contribute a unique aspect to it. On the one side, God brings love, compassion and vulnerability whereas, on the other side, humanity has an ability to engage creatively in the world according to the intentionality of God. Thus, not only does God need humanity, as Sölle observes, but without friends, as she also notes, God is weak.

The affirmation that God is present in suffering is critical to affirming the humanity of those who are suffering. Yet more than this is needed. If God is simply present and not affected by the suffering, then as we have noted, such a god is a monster and hardly deserving of worship. As Christians, it must therefore be affirmed that God is not only engaged by the suffering, but also experiences it. Out of love, God suffers with the people.

Asylum Seekers

5th September 2000

“Scorched earth at Woomera”, the headlines said,
We’re ‘illegals’, you say,
We protest because we’d rather be dead
Than rot here one more day.

I may be a hot head (and look like one),
My face does not look mine,
It masks the pain of atrocities done,
To people over time.

My sister was raped, my father was shot,
My mother now looks old,
“Australians under the collar get hot,
But good people we’re told”.

“There’s a ship going there”, my mother said,
“I’ve paid; please don’t ask how,
There may be pirates, and shortage of bread,
But son it’s never, or now.”

I was told that in your land there’s a law,
P’raps I was mistaken,
That proof beyond reasonable doubt before
Guilt is undertaken.

But after we landed on your north shore,
Our freedom came to an end,
Twelve months here in prison, and others more,
Has bushed us “round your bend”.

“Scorched earth at Woomera”, the deadlines read,
Asylum seekers say,
We protest because we’d rather be dead,
Than rot here one more day.

“Don’t pay the ferryman ‘til you land,
Safe on the other side”
But how can I give Australia a hand,
Imprisoned and locked inside?

-AN

Relationship in God

Introduction

Having explored the issue of who God is not in relation to the suffering world, it is now time to explore some of the ways in which we can talk about God in the face of the evil that is inflicted on people. We have already seen that Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates have soundly rejected a model of God in which God actively chooses to intervene in the world: such a model can hardly be reconciled with the mistreatment of asylum seekers in the immigration detention centres, and even less with the slaughter of innocent people in Auschwitz. If such an image of God is rejected, then the question remains as to how God relates to the world. Although the answer may be drawn from the wisdom of differing religious thought, it must remain specifically Christian. One unique aspect of Christianity is the concept of the Trinity and this forms the focus of much of Moltmann's theology. However neither Sölle nor the advocates spoke much of the Trinity. What can the interplay between the ways in which Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates reflect on the nature of God inform us about how we consider relationships within God and between God and the world?

Essential Relationship

Relationship is, according to Sölle, "essential for God."¹ Like love, justice and freedom, relationships are part of God's nature and Sölle argues that it is impossible to consider God without God's relationship with humanity and the whole creation. Although traditional theology acknowledges this relationship between humanity and God, it is a one-way relationship, rather than being of a reciprocal nature and Sölle deconstructs this presumption. She argues that "unilateral relationships in which one person is always the giving one and the other always the receiving one are morally

¹ Sölle. *Work & love*, p. 25

intolerable and lead to neurotic distortions.”² Sölle sees this as also applying to the relationship between God and humanity³

Similarly, Sölle critiques the modern “reduction of the individual to subjectivity and of salvation to the private [that] signifie[s] a God who is only related to individuals and then only inwardly and secretly.”⁴ Instead, a relationship with God should affect relationships with other people and this will empower people to act with justice and love.⁵ It is in this way that humans can be said to participate in and with God. Sölle writes:

Real relationships means that an exchange takes place and that people gain a share in the creative, good, non-compelling power of God. Above all Jewish thought has helped me to clarify this participation in God. In the Talmud, the image of God in human beings is not understood as a spiritual image; rather, we are the image of God, which means that we can act like God.⁶

Although, as previously mentioned, Sölle views sin as the rupture of the relationship between humans or between humans and God, she sees grace as the reconciliation of that rupture.⁷ However, she cautions that forgiveness by God should be limited to when the offended one cannot forgive. Without this limitation forgiveness becomes problematic because of Sölle’s focus on the social nature of sin.⁸ When sin is about the rupture of relationship, as Sölle suggests, then the healing of that relationship is integral to the forgiveness, thus the caution about focusing on forgiveness from God. However, with regards to Sölle’s view of the relationship between God and humanity, God requires a relationship with humanity in order to change the world. Sölle tells the story of a woman who had:

² Sölle. *Mystery of death*, p. 83

³ Ibid., p. 81

⁴ Naudé and Sölle. *Hope for faith*, p. 102

⁵ Sölle. *Silent cry*, p. 89

⁶ Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 188

⁷ Ibid., p. 78

⁸ Naudé and Sölle. *Hope for faith*, p. 98

Struggled for years with the Jewish-Christian problem because she wanted to know how it came to the point of Shoah, the extermination of European Jews. This woman had understood that in the Nazi period in Germany God was small and weak. God was in fact powerless because God had no friends, male or female.⁹

Thus, the mutuality of relationship with God is explained. Sölle suggests that humans not only rely on God, but also God needs humans in order to act within the world.

Via Negativa

Moltmann argues that relationships are central to understanding God and this is not only in reference to internal relationships within the Trinity but also to the relationships between humanity and God. He sees the relationship between God and humanity as reciprocal “because this relationship must be seen as a living one”;¹⁰ though it is neither a relationship between equals nor one of “causality and dependency either.”¹¹ However, the way in which Moltmann sees this relationship between humans and God is never made explicit, but rather is defined in negative terms.

Moltmann’s exploration of the relationship between humans and God does include what it means for humans to be made in the “image of God”,¹² suggesting that this relates to the qualities of humanity and that “it is grounded in their relationship to God.”¹³ Moltmann elsewhere suggests this creation in the image of God relates to the human’s whole existence:

The whole person, not merely his soul; the true human community, not the individual; humanity as it is bound up with nature, not simply human beings in the confrontation with nature – it is these which are the image of God and his glory.¹⁴

⁹ Sölle. *Theology for skeptics*, p. 15

¹⁰ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 98

¹¹ Ibid., p. 3

¹² Genesis 1:27

¹³ Moltmann. *God for a secular society*, p. 84

¹⁴ Moltmann. *God in Creation*, p. 221

Thus it is not merely individual humans who, in the view of Moltmann, are made in the image of God, but rather humans in community. For Moltmann, individual people cannot realise their potential as being made in the image of God, but rather relationship with other people and other parts of creation is required.

God as Community

The concept of God in community, or the Trinity, is central to Moltmann's understanding of the relationships both within God and between God and the world. He critiques contemporary theological discussion for not seeing the relevance of the Trinity to Christian life and in response to this focuses on the concept of the social Trinity.¹⁵ His focus on the social Trinity returns to the concept of earthly society reflecting heavenly order whilst at the same time arguing against an autocratic view of society that allows some groups to oppress others.¹⁶ For Moltmann, "the triune God isn't a solitary, unloved ruler in heaven who subjugates everything as earthy despots do. He is a God in community, rich in relationships. 'God is love'." ¹⁷Thus, for Moltmann, the fact that Christians believe in a Triune God rather than only a monotheistic God tells us something of the nature of God for the "God of community [offers] a wealth of relationships."¹⁸ These relationships are not only within God or between God and creation, but are also influencing the relationships within creation too.

At the same time, Moltmann is careful to deny both the subordination of the Son and modalism, which were two heresies of the early church.¹⁹ However, whilst he rejects either of these interpretations of the Trinity, he does not propose a solution to the problem. Rather he reminds his readers "we have to conclude that no summing-up, generic terms must be used at all in the doctrine of the Trinity. For in the life of the

¹⁵ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. viii

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moltmann. *God for a secular society*, p. 101

¹⁸ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 91

¹⁹ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 132ff

immanent Trinity everything is unique.”²⁰ The Trinity thus remains a mystery that for Moltmann can only be described in the negative.

It is the belief in the Trinity which, for Moltmann, says something about the relationships of Christians with the world. Because of “the ‘tri-unity’ of gathered love”,²¹ humanity and creation can be gathered and united into God.²² Thus Moltmann suggests that rather than an exclusive view of God, the Trinity calls Christians into an inclusive view. For Moltmann, the Trinity reveals the love and fellowship of God and invites humanity into that friendship.²³ Indeed, as Bauckham points out, Moltmann sees “Trinitarian theology of the cross as being essential to be[ing] able to say that God... suffers in himself.”²⁴ Without a Trinitarian focus to theology, Moltmann sees it as impossible to maintain that God the creator suffered without descending into patripassianism.

Whilst much has been mentioned so far as to Moltmann’s concept of God the creator, little has been said specifically about Christ in the incarnation and the Holy Spirit. It is to these two members of the Trinity which will now be explored in a little more detail. The importance of the divinity of Jesus and the Father’s presence in the suffering of Jesus is reiterated by Moltmann.²⁵ However, Moltmann goes further in emphasising the human experiences of Jesus of Nazareth, particularly his coming as a weak child,²⁶ and his passion and death. The tradition which sees Christ as descending into hell has three key benefits for Moltmann. Firstly, even in the experiences of hell, God is there. This affirms that nothing can separate us from God and God’s presence can reach to the places, such as hell, where God has typically been seen as absent. Secondly, because

²⁰ Ibid. p. 190

²¹ Ibid., p. 56

²² Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 91

²³ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 56

²⁴ Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 100-101

²⁵ Moltmann makes this point on several occasions including *A broad place*, p. 193 & *The trinity*, p. 22

²⁶ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 4

Christ has suffered hell he can be beside humanity in their suffering of hell. For Moltmann this means that God is present with those who are suffering and can understand the suffering that people experience. Thirdly “hell and death have been gathered up and ended in God.”²⁷ With Christ’s presence in hell, there is no more hell, thus hope is generated. Hence, even in experiences of hell, humanity is not separated from God.²⁸

In many ways, Moltmann equates the Spirit with the Jewish concepts of Shekinah: it is God’s indwelling with the creation.²⁹ It is this divine indwelling which Moltmann suggests is “God’s inexpressible closeness” leading to the understanding of God’s closeness in suffering.³⁰ This Spirit is a creative power, that not only creates, but also recreates.³¹ The Spirit rejoices in the joyful times and cries out for justice where there is oppression.³² However, Moltmann sees the Spirit as being more than simply God’s presence in the midst of suffering. For Moltmann, the Spirit is that which enables Christians to live in the anticipation of God’s reign and to do so in prophetic manner, in contradiction to the world.³³ In part, this prophetic ministry of the Spirit is through awakening faith in Christ, which allows the hope for God’s reign.³⁴ Moltmann argues that the Spirit is a powerful force, not only in the lives of Christians, but in the whole creation. He calls it “‘holy’ because it sanctifies life and renews the face of the earth.”³⁵ Thus Moltmann sees the Spirit as being present in all creation, not merely be a Christian or even human phenomenon and thus meaning that all life must be respected.³⁶

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 252

²⁹ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 104

³⁰ Moltmann. *The Spirit of life*, p. 11

³¹ Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit*, p. 57

³² Ibid., p. 65

³³ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 54

³⁴ Moltmann. *The church in the power of the Spirit*, p. 197

³⁵ Moltmann. *The Spirit of life*, p. 8

³⁶ Moltmann. *God in Creation*, p. xi-xii

God in Relationship

According to advocates God's presence was in the detention centres, particularly in the relationships that were established. Additionally, many advocates had a strong sense of a relationship with God which was in spite of what was happening in the detention centres. Rev'd Walter, a theologian, described both these aspects of God being in relationship by drawing on Bonhoeffer's assertion that:

In Christian community we actually discover Christ between us in the relationship. That's what makes it a Christian community.

This affirmation was by no means isolated to Rev'd Walter. Other advocates agreed with this proposition, although they did not use such theological language. God was seen as being among and within the refugees and asylum seekers: one advocate, when asked where God was in working with refugees responded:

Everywhere... well, really among the refugees themselves. I could recognise God in those people. [Sarah]

Another advocate was more specific:

I think God was certainly there when we were visiting the asylum seekers in detention. We just, you know, had, knew, his presence with us in that place, in that time. We could just sense it there. It really amazed me the refugees responded to us, showed us love. They were very grateful for us being there. While they had so little, they wanted to offer us, when we went in. They would be the ones who would insist that they get us drinks, you know, cups of tea and coffee and so forth and took pride in doing that. Just in that very human encounter we just realised God was there and God was part of that. [Janet]

Overall, the concept of "love God and love your neighbour" was central to both the continuation of working with asylum seekers and refugees and also in recognising God in the situations which were encountered. Many advocates saw the two parts of this statement as being equivocal. Rev'd Don reflected extensively on how the relationship that God has with humanity affects how people interact with each other.

But I guess the kind of hope that underlies all of that is this, you know, the hope for, I think, the ultimate one is the hope of a relationship with God... The self is created in relation to God because it goes beyond what you are yourself. It's not

just satisfying your own satisfaction. You know, and it's related to a much bigger universe... And that's the way God works, that's the relationship side. Because you have a relationship with God and you know that's the understanding and in some way the whole thing is going to make sense again. And that you know there's this caring, ultimately that the universe is a friendly place to be... I think the key to it is this relationship with God. And that is like in Jesus' words, "love God and love your neighbour." And the two of those have to go together... And loving God is identical to loving yourself to that extent. But if you want to be the best kind of person you can be then be, in love with the universe and with God.

This certainty of God's presence assisted advocates to keep going through their difficult times and to maintain confidence that their stance on refugees was important in continuing work in spite of opposition. Another advocate spoke of the importance of his relationship with God in the difficult times which he had experienced:

I can't describe God, but I know God exists. And that's through at one point in my life I went through a great time of loneliness and suffering, brought about by my own stupidity. I went away and spent a week begging God to help me and I guess I read a lot of the psalms and at the end of the week I knew that if nobody else loved me in the world, that God loved me. That sort of makes everything okay in a sense. [William]

Rev'd Gary had a similar experience:

Anyway, I'm sort of sitting here going, I was going through nobody loves me sort of time and I don't do that often and I'm not good with it. I took my dogs for a walk and I went down along the beach and there inscribed in the beach on the sand was "I love you." And I was going... OK end of story. I don't know who put that there, I don't know what it was put there for, but at that moment I'm sitting there saying, "Why can't I be loved," you know. And I walked and "I love you"... So I'm continually being told by God that he loves me. So and that I've never ever had that before and in the sense it sort of made me well, what, that's my problem, you know. God loves me, what's my problem? No problem. My problem is God loves me. Terrible problem.

However, it was not only the self in relation to God which enabled the continued work with asylum seekers. For several advocates it was seeing asylum seekers in relation to God that not only helped motivate them, but also helped them continue their support in spite of their difficulties. The love of God was seen as being just as applicable to asylum seekers as it was to other members of society.

It's a difficult concept the whole idea of God, but we feel that the universe is full of God and we are part of that performance and we endeavour to make ourselves available to everyone because we believe that everyone that we have contact with are children of God and therefore we try to see that in them. [James]

Another concept, which demonstrated advocates' perception of where God was in their work with asylum seekers, was that of the imitation of Christ. For advocates, the gospel stories were full of times when Jesus, and the disciples, had gone out of their way to support those who had been rejected by their society.

I think that you just read one of the gospels, read Mark's gospel through and you just get this overwhelming image of someone whose life was lived for other people and who had such a radical ministry and understanding of life's purpose and I think that was very powerful in their lives. And I guess that's what my main understanding would be that we are following Christ's footsteps in that sort of action. [Charles]

The affirmation that God was present in the midst of the suffering witnessed by advocates was important in giving the strength to continue in their support of asylum seekers in spite of the community and governmental pressures. The Christian story was one that they saw as sustaining their stance of being present to the asylum seekers who had been rejected by the broader community.

Changed relationships

One of the key motivators expressed by advocates for their work with asylum seekers and refugees was their faith. For some, the challenges presented by the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees meant they had to rethink their understanding of who God is in this world where suffering occurs particularly when inflicted by other humans.

Judith reflected that she had:

A sense that as a Christian it was exactly where God wanted you to be, so just hang in there. The sense that you were doing the very best that you could at the time to help and inevitably, if you get involved with someone, you grow to love them, then there's always the cost. And that would be true through the whole of life.

As with many of the other advocates, this sense of being where God wanted her to be was valuable in helping Judith continue her work with the refugees in spite of the personal difficulties that this engendered. Caroline described herself as coming from a conservative-evangelical background. She had previously worked in a developing country and felt:

A change came in for us in a big way [through her work in Africa]. That was the first big change for me, challenging my very black and white evangelical beliefs. They sent us as one of those wonderful missionaries to go and convert the world. And getting there and suddenly finding I was the richest person in town and a big shock for me because here we had been an Anglican curate and quite poor and suddenly we were the richest person and we found that we were to convert these people, but they were all Christians.

It was this work in Africa which later led her to working with asylum seekers in detention. Other advocates had changed views of God that were somewhat less dramatic but still important in exploring an understanding of God in a world of suffering. Advocates learnt to wrestle with God in a way that created new depth and understanding to their faith:

Most significant have been those really, really hard times when you know God's placed you in a situation and things are just so awful that you can't see a way out. The first time I went through that was in the Philippines and an American friend and I, we had the same experiences, shared them. We went through all the Gospels and found every instance of when Jesus was angry, which kind of allowed us to acknowledge our anger and say, "It's right to be angry when things are so wrong." [Rev'd Kathleen]

Whilst advocates often found their faith was strengthened by their work with asylum seekers and refugees, it also raised questions about their faith. In particular, Frances found herself questioning her faith, although it is still important to her:

I suppose in a way faith is something I've taken for granted, although for times I do question where God is in some of the stories that I hear and even now, with the loss of life in Victoria [in the 2009 bushfires], that puts pressure on one's faith. And I've had a few arguments with our priest about that. It does make it difficult and it's very hard sometimes to see the hand of God in what's happening.

Other advocates found their faith affirmed. Sharon visited a detention centre, often several times a week:

I think I could go on for another hour, but I did, absolutely, affirm my faith, and the fact that God is with people in their utter despair and step by step. I mean it was very slow and I think that's the challenging thing that you don't see instant answers.

Seeing God at work in the world, in spite of the suffering, was important to many advocates. It was, in many ways, seen as a parallel to their own action in visiting and supporting the refugees and asylum seekers. However, advocates were emphatic that God's action was not seen as endorsing human inaction:

Faith is what happened in Jesus Christ, where God who is at work and sometimes we overhear and discover what it is that God's done. [Rev'd Walter]

So if we choose to believe and have faith, then God is there for us to gain strength to do the right thing. [Joyce]

So I guess it gave me the opportunity to show, like to show compassion and hope and faith to people who were really hoping for something like that, who really needed it, who hadn't experienced it so far in their dealings with people in Australia much and just were very fearful of what the future might have. So it caused a lot of us to think about well, if we are here in our comfortable lives as Christians and God somehow has put us in this place at this time, well, what does this mean for us? What is God calling us to do? It seems to be fairly obvious. Could we do it? What could we do? We're feeling, so we're just sort of normal people, inadequacy, we don't know how to go about it, we don't know what the future will hold, but we will just do what we can, step by step. [Janet]

Thus the faith of the advocates not only motivated, but also supported their work with asylum seekers and refugees. Advocates related how their faith developed in unexpected ways because of the new relationships that were formed that both challenged and confirmed their faith.

A Reciprocal Relationship

As instanced earlier, one of the few themes that occurs in Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates' reflections on who God is in a world of suffering is that of the necessity and importance of relationship to God. Yet the way each depicts this relationship varies,

and the interaction between their individual nuances can broaden the theology of relationship within God and what this means for a suffering world.

Moltmann, as we have seen, explores each member of the Trinity systematically; whilst he does acknowledge the importance of a reciprocal relationship between humanity and God, this is not given as much depth in his writings as that of the Trinity. Sölle, likewise, deconstructs the traditional one-way relationship between God and humans, but in discussing the relationships of God she draws on the incarnation to focus on God's relationship with humanity rather than the internal relationships within the Trinity. Advocates, on the other hand, had little concern to talk about concepts such as the Trinity or how God relates to humanity, but rather affirmed a sense of God's presence with them as they engaged in the suffering of asylum seekers and refugees.

These discrepancies raise the question as to whether a theology of the Trinity is necessary to a theology of God's relationship with a suffering world: what relevance do the internal relationships of God have to the issue of God's engagement in suffering? On one level it is, as Moltmann points out, necessary, since in the passion of Christ, God experiences suffering; however Old Testament texts depict God as suffering for the people,³⁷ therefore God's suffering was a theological understanding before the life of Christ.

Sölle in exploring the work of Christ in the world argues that he was present to love and not to suffer,³⁸ thus his sufferings are the result of his love. This concept may well resonate with the experiences of the advocates, many of whom told about broken relationships because of their support of asylum seekers and refugees:

And I know a lot of people, even in my own church criticised me and I have lost family members, brothers and sisters that think I am a nutcase. But that was it.

³⁷ For example Jeremiah 8:18-9:3

³⁸ Sölle. *War & love*, p. 94

You walked through and to think we had all these wonderful people locked up.
[Karen]

With advocates focusing on the presence of God in the world, one must question whether it is necessary to have a Trinitarian understanding of this presence in order for this presence to be specifically Christian. Given that the Trinity is one of the key aspects that differentiate Christianity from the other monotheistic religions, is a theology of God's presence without the Trinity explicitly stated a Christian doctrine? The answer to this can come from advocates themselves, who spoke of God in such a wide variety of terms encompassing God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.³⁹ Some advocates did speak of God as Spirit; however, they also broadened traditional images used to describe God, particularly in relation to a suffering world.

The challenge arising from the reflections of advocates is whether it really is necessary to limit the ways in which God is spoken about or whether it is not better, as advocates have done, to continue to draw analogies for God from the contemporary world. Seeing God as midwife, friend or companion has both its strengths and weaknesses, but using and continuing to use a variety of images for God means that such images are less likely to be imbued with God-like attributes and worshipped in their own right. As contemporary feminist theologians point out, this is exactly what has happened with the use of the male metaphors for God, particularly those of father, king or lord.⁴⁰ Surely such metaphors do have their limitations and whilst it is not within the scope of this thesis to explore what those limitations might be, this is an issue which requires continuing exploration by the theological community at large.

³⁹ These words are used by contemporary Christian feminists in preference to the more traditional "Father, Son and Spirit" as to maintain only masculine images of God is one form of idolatry that has been present in the church for much of its history.

⁴⁰ E.g. Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a feminist theology*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 53-54

Finally, the question must be raised as to what hope relationships with God give, particularly when the image of God as intervening in human affairs is denied as strongly as advocates do. Moltmann, in many ways restricts his understanding of God's suffering by focusing it on the crucifixion. Whilst he does not deny that God experiences the suffering in the world, this to Moltmann appears as secondary to God's suffering because of the passion of Christ. However, Moltmann does allow God's suffering because of love and in his writing this is not limited to just the passion. My reading of Sölle and the advocates is they see God as much more engaged in the world than in Moltmann's view. Sölle sees the relationship of God with the world as being mediated through humanity, whereas advocates affirmed that God was present in the detention centres before they came. The relationship between God and the suffering ones of the world is so close that when they suffer, God suffers too.

There was one guy who had he'd actually spent the first two years in detention in Maribyrnong detention centre and he'd become enlisted in Christianity there through a Christian visitor and he had been attending weekly bible study and he'd actually decided to convert to Christianity while he was in Maribyrnong and he'd requested baptism but the person who'd been visiting him had refused to baptize him because they said we'd prefer to wait until you get out of detention. We're not even going to contemplate it while you're in detention.

So then after two years in Maribyrnong he was transferred to Port Headland and the very first Sunday he was there he started attending the church service I was running and very quickly requested baptism from me so I put him through this whole process. And when I finally got to the final interview with him I used to say to the guys now you now becoming a Christian will not guarantee you getting into Australia and it is likely that you will be sent back to Iran again. What would it mean for you if you're baptized and you're sent back to Iran? And most of them at that point would just say I'm a dead man, I would be killed. And this guy I said it to him and then I'd say this then is a life and death decision you are making. The decision to be baptized could cost you your life. Do you really want to be baptized and some would pull out at that point. This particular guy I said to him, well what would happen if you went back to Iran and he just said [draws hand across the throat] you know my throat would be cut. . And I said well, do you really want to make this decision and he said. I have found life, and they cannot take that away from me.

Rev'd Sue

Hope from God

Introduction

How does the concept of “God” fit into concepts of hope? If the concepts cannot be connected, then there is no Christian basis for hope and therefore the issue of how God brings hope simply must be examined. By now, there is little surprise regarding the difference between the ways in which Moltmann and the advocates viewed God’s connection with hope; Sölle, as has already been noted, writes sparingly about hope and therefore does not link God and hope.

If, as we have already argued, we can and indeed must talk about hope in our theology, then we also need to name what makes this a specifically Christian sense of hope. What are the mechanisms through which God brings hope into the world? With this is also the question of whether and how God intervenes in the world; if we argue that God does have direct intervention in the world, then the further question is raised as to why there is still suffering. In the section on suffering I have already examined the question of where God is in suffering and therefore now I will explore what makes a specifically Christian hope which can speak to our suffering world.

A theological gap

For all of Moltmann’s writing about hope from a Christian perspective, he writes surprisingly little about God and hope in an overt way. To be sure, he does write about God in relation to hopeful concepts such as faith, future and promise but his writing on God and hope is somewhat limited. This has also been noted by other authors; Genovesi suggests “the observation has been made by some that the ‘theology of hope’ is somewhat of a misnomer, and that a more accurate description of this particular

theological endeavour would speak rather of a theology of promise.”¹ Moltmann sees hope in God in terms of eschatology and the coming “basilica” or reign of God; his arguments on hope from God are centred on the end time and a future event. Indeed, he places so much importance on eschatology that he draws it “from the periphery to the centre, from the end of time to the middle of time, from beyond death to life in this world.”² Likewise, Sölle writes virtually nothing on God and hope, but this is to be expected as she writes so little about hope at all. Once again, Sölle connects God to hopeful concepts such as love and life.

The act of hope is, for Moltmann, the calling from God for all Christians. Indeed, he maintains it is a command:

True hope -- which means the hope that endures and sustains us -- is based on God's call and command. We are called to hope. It is the command: a command to resist death. It is a call: the call to divine life.³

This command to hope is based on faith in God's promise. It is promise which for Moltmann an essential part of Christian faith. Moltmann argues, “God in his freedom binds himself to be faithful to the promise he has given.”⁴ Hence, the fact that God is faithful is a cause of hope for Christians. It is this promise which enables the future to be anticipated, even when this is in contradiction to the present experience of the world.⁵ However, given Moltmann's focus on the resurrection and future, one must ask the question of what this promise of God is and what it means to the world in the here and now. However, a most important aspect for Moltmann is that hope in God is also based on hope for God's new creation and a future of justice and true peace for all humanity. Hope from God does not allow people to abandon the world, but rather to be

¹ Genovesi. *Expectant creativity*, p. 87

² Müller-Fahrenholz. *Kingdom & power*, p. 44

³ Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 19

⁴ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 121

⁵ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 104

immersed in its suffering.⁶ It demands an end to all the suffering found in human life. Moltmann also emphasises this promise is of the presence of God in the world,⁷ rather than the intervention of a powerful God or the rescuing from this world. Even so, it is only God who can bring about the reign of God, regardless of the actions of people.⁸ As Moltmann asserts:

The hope for such a presence of God can be fulfilled, however, only if the negatives of death, suffering, tears, guilt, and evil have disappeared from reality, that is, in a new creation, which, figuratively speaking, is no longer a mixture of day and night, earth and sea, and in which, ontologically speaking, being and nonbeing are no longer intertwined. The hope for the future, in which God is God and a new creation his dwelling place, the expectation of that home of identity in which man is at one with God, nature, and himself radically anew confronts the unfulfilled present with the theodicy question.⁹

This unfulfilled present is the basis of Moltmann's theology. He sees that both promise and faith point away from the present and towards "the as yet unrealized future."¹⁰ Like other aspects of Moltmann's construction of hope, faith does not lead to escapism from the world, but rather engagement in it. He is emphatic about this, arguing that "faith can have nothing to do with fleeing the world, with resignation and escapism,"¹¹ but rather it mediates "the prospect of a new and different future from God."¹² Faith, therefore, leads to the hope that the world can be different and anticipates that difference.

Similarly, Moltmann argues that faith is not the same as belief; seeing the former as "experiencing the creative power of God, who makes the impossible reality."¹³ This experiencing of God's creative power is also for Moltmann a call to join in God's

⁶ O'Donnell. *Trinity and temporality*, p. 152

⁷ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 101

⁸ Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 13-14

⁹ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 61

¹⁰ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 100

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

¹² Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 118

¹³ Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 29

creative acts and “participating in the resurrection process.”¹⁴ It is this invitation to joining in the creative acts of God that enables the anticipation of God’s reign and hence the action to work towards a more just world.

Faith enables perseverance in the face of seemingly impossible odds. Moltmann refers back to “the God who created being out of nothing”¹⁵ as a metaphor for action in the face of the likelihood that nothing can be done. He argues that “through their faith, Christians participate in the creative freedom of God.”¹⁶ This creative freedom looks towards “a new creation in which the whole groaning creation shall be free from the bondage of evil and death;”¹⁷ yet at the same time Moltmann never states whether in his opinion Christians actually contribute towards the building of the reign of God.¹⁸ Thus, it is in faith that Christians work towards the restoration of creation as a part of working towards the coming reign of God. This work is an act of hope that anticipates God’s future in the world.

Advocates & God’s hope

Even with advocates’ maintaining a view of hope which had a very practical outcome, their discussions on hope also were very much focused on God and how God brings hope. This hope in God and from God was given a new depth by the engagement in the suffering experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. Rev’d Steve had also worked with refugees in Africa and reflected on that experience:

It took me a while to realise that the “God wills it” was not about basically giving up hope and feeling hopeless. There was a bit of that, but it was more trusting, like taking every aspect of life, the joyous times and the difficult times, your health and acknowledging that God is in all of these.

¹⁴ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 30

¹⁵ Moltmann. *God in Creation*, p. 93

¹⁶ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 67

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 39

This was shared by other advocates who had their first experiences of working with refugees when they were in Australia. Interestingly, talking about God and hope was more common for those who actually visited detention centres compared to those who only assisted refugees once they were released. Perhaps, then, it was the utter helplessness of the detention centres which generated this reflection, whereas the other advocates were busy in the practicalities of changing lives.

It was the hope of God which assisted advocates to continue through the difficulties they faced in supporting asylum seekers in detention. With community opposition to asylum seekers and the stress of seeing their friends in detention mistreated and even deported, it is little wonder that many advocates experienced symptoms of trauma. Yet in the face of these traumatising experiences, they were able to maintain their hope in God:

I can remember some times when I used to walk along the beach ... there were certainly a couple of times when I can remember praying over and over to myself, "Lord, take this cup of suffering away from me" so being able to identify the pain and suffering in myself and hand it over to God was a way and means to consider that there is the hope. [Rev'd David]

This experience of presence of God, already discussed in chapter seven, was significant in giving people hope. The advocates knew they were not alone in their struggles and often would identify with the Gospel stories to make sense of and maintain hope in the midst of the suffering they encountered.

The hope is my hope, my attitude to hope now is that through God and with God there is always hope. That no matter what happens to us there is a hope that God is working in us somehow or another. [Elizabeth]

Advocates also saw hope in the transformation and healing of communities. Hope certainly was not an individual affair, although it did have that element for those who were suffering. Such healing was brought about with God and through God; humanity works with God in order to recreate the community.

Hope for me is seeing possibilities and seeing how communities can become and seeing how individuals can become whole. It's an attitude of trusting that God is at work and that God will lead us in that work. It's trusting that we have the capacity to work with God to make the world a better place. It's not that there is something after death, I don't know whether there is or isn't, I don't really care. It's about making sense out of life. [Rev'd Kathleen]

However, according to the anecdotes of the advocates, they were not the only ones to view hope in this way. Some spoke of the hope that asylum seekers expressed and related what hope meant to those in detention. Whilst once again, many of these hopes were practical, particularly hope for freedom, a significant number of asylum seekers expressed hope in God in spite of their situations. Rev'd David, who was one of those who worked as a chaplain to the detention centres related:

They knew if they were going to be baptised and become Christians, they would be buried up to their necks and people would stone them, but that didn't matter, to them that's what the cost of discipleship was about. God was alive, God was in them, they just wanted to follow.

Rev'd Susan, another detention centre chaplain, spoke about assuring a particular group of asylum seekers that there was always hope although "everything rational said these guys were going to end up sent home dead," a comment which she later reflected she did not know why she said it, and she called it her "greatest act of faith." In the light of this, she then reflected on God and hope:

Hope for me is what the resurrection is about. It's about God being able to bring new life out of death. It's about believing that even when the world does the absolute worst it possibly can to you and feels like it's totally destroyed you, God is still able to bring new life out of death.

For many advocates the concept of hope from God became more real because of their time with asylum seekers in detention. Supporting asylum seekers in the depths of despair has given a new appreciation of hope which perhaps only suffering can bring. In some ways, it meant that advocates learnt to trust God in ways they had not previously needed to do. One asylum seeker used the metaphor of hope being like a

tiny spark of light in the darkness, even when it was so small that it could hardly be seen. Reflecting on this, Rev'd Joan related:

Hope for me means that when the situation looks hopeless there is a sense or a sign or a belief that this is not the end. This is not how it ultimately is, even if the worst comes to the worst, you hold out hope that you are actually making a journey with the Spirit of God even if you can't see that happening.

It was hope in God which enabled many of the asylum seekers and their supporters to continue looking towards the something greater than what was happening at the time. Admittedly, this was far easier for advocates than for asylum seekers, because they were not constantly immersed in a toxic environment.

In the same way, the images of God used by advocates were ones which gave hope. Rev'd Gary reflected on his image of God in a particularly difficult time of his life:

God is love. God's the creator, we are made in his image. God is revealing himself to us all the time. Things aren't going to get worse, things are getting better. Lives are changing, people say sorry.

Ultimately, although hope was founded in God, it was humanity's engagement in this hope which advocates saw as making the difference. Without human action, no change would be possible. As Rev'd Lyn reflected:

I think God is working through us. I think God has the dream, the dream of what can be. The people are needed to be human conduits for that hope. And I think we take God's hope, we all hope for justice and peace and love and a world full of God's grace.

Whilst advocates spoke extensively of how they viewed hope from God, unlike Moltmann, they rarely spoke about the reign of God in their reflections. Only Rev'd Walter, an evangelical theologian, spoke of what the reign of God meant. He explored this in a variety of ways, but primarily in relation to what it meant that the "kingdom of God is at hand."¹⁹

If Jesus says the kingdom of God is at hand, and his whole preaching [and] teaching is about the kingdom, then what becomes important is how you enter

¹⁹ E.g. Mark 1:15

the kingdom. Because he [Jesus] presumes that, [he] teaches about it. And the extraordinary thing is the way you enter the kingdom is by allowing God to bring you into it. There ain't no other way. You can't get into it by anything you do. Which is for me the way he lived his life.

For Rev'd Walter this concept of being brought into the kingdom of God also meant, a change in relationship with God, from that of demanding of God, one of the common methods of prayer, to being in relationship with God and allowing that relationship to lead one's life. It is through this relationship that he saw action taking place rather than action being what brought a person in to God's kingdom.

Another concept arising from the advocates' reflections which also connects with Moltmann's kingdom of God is the question of what it means to be the church. Advocates frequently affirmed that the Church as a whole must engage with the suffering in the world. This was a common theme when asked about their message to the wider church:

If we don't show God's love to the least of us, then why are we claiming it for us? [Ron]

God still calls us to go and be where the hurt and suffering are. And we're to seek Christ in them and we are to show Christ's face to them. [Rev'd Kathleen]

According to these advocates, it is only in demonstrating God's love in practical ways that the Church is being true to its calling. To extend that concept using Moltmann's language, it is then when the Church is being true to its calling that the kingdom of God is at hand.

God and the hope for our world

Although Moltmann's best known work is *Theology of Hope*, he surprisingly rarely explores concepts of hope directly in relation to God, whereas for advocates, in reflecting on God, hope was one of the key concepts which arose. Moltmann argues

that hope is a command for Christians from God,²⁰ yet it seems that he is hesitant, perhaps rightly, to talk of the connection in further details. The advocates, on the other hand, saw hope because God was with them in their suffering. In many ways, this, as has previously been explored, is God in solidarity with the advocates in the same way that they showed solidarity for asylum seekers and refugees.

However another difference between Moltmann and the advocates must also be noted. As we have already seen (in chapter nine), Moltmann relates hope very strongly to eschatology – God’s final consummation of all things. For Moltmann, Christian hope is based on the promise that God will act in the end time and bring about justice in the world. However, advocates have another perspective that has some similarity to Moltmann. God is already experienced in the here and now; God is seen as part of daily life and it is this involvement of God in daily life which gives hope. These two concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather, the latter needs further development and exploration.

That God is present in the world is one of the assertions of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Moltmann himself explores the Jewish concept of “Shekinah”; the indwelling of God with the scattered people. Moltmann cites Jewish tradition that the Shekinah is one of the “terms for the particular historical real presence of the almighty God.”²¹ Therefore, Moltmann does acknowledge the current presence of God being active in the world; however, one must ask whether this does enough to highlight the hope in God’s presence in the here and now.

This imagery of the presence of God with people in suffering connects strongly to the Johannine image of the Holy Spirit as a Paraclete and perhaps it can be used to develop a Trinitarian theology which reflects the experiences of the advocates. Paraclete has

²⁰ Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 19

²¹ Moltmann. *Experiences in theology*, p. 34

been defined as “a Greek noun meaning ‘one called to the side of’ and therefore an ‘advocate’.”²² The role of an advocate is not so much intervention on behalf of another person, although that can be the case, but rather to assist the person’s story to be heard, especially when society has sought to silence an individual. Hope comes through being able to express the story; it breaks down barriers and allows others to see the common humanity that is shared in spite of differing circumstances.

If this image of God as an advocate is taken further, then it can be suggested that God is the one who helps people’s stories be heard, and it is through the telling of those stories, the situation can change as relationships change. In this way, God is neither seen as an interventionist God nor as having nothing to contribute to the world. It perhaps stretches Sölle’s views that God needs humanity; God needs at least one person to listen to the story being told so that it can then be shared with a wider group of people. Hope comes as the stories are heard, as the isolation is broken down, and relationships are formed which are different to what they would have been otherwise.

Whilst advocates spoke of a hope for a changed future, this was not in some distant end-time but rather in the foreseeable future. They looked towards hope and healing which is tangible and where the effects can be observed in the lived experience of people whom they encountered. From a biblical point of view, this view of hope is similar to the hope that Jesus brought about through his healing ministry. Through the healing, there was then the hope for a return to inclusion in the community, so a practical change brought about by Jesus brought the potential for more changes in the lives of those who were affected. To me, this does demonstrate that there is a place for the immediacy of hope in the Christian life.

²² "Paraclete" *A Dictionary of the Bible*. W. R. F. Browning. Oxford University Press, 1997. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Murdoch University. 23 September 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.prospecto.murdoch.edu.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t94.e1408>>

Thus there is a general agreement that hope can and does come from God, but there is a clear discrepancy in how this occurs. The advocates, as has been shown, focused on the tangible presence of God in the here and now. This is important to Moltmann, but his focus in relating to God and hope is the assurance that God has acted in the past combined with the promise that God will act again in the future. However, this future action is, for Moltmann, focused on the future reign of God and it is this concept to which we will turn in the final chapter.

The Storm

God spoke to Job from the whirlwind
From the raging, screaming storm
Ripping through the land
And said: look beyond yourself.

Where is God in the whirlwind?
As thoughts and images,
Feelings and words
Whip round in my mind
Crashing through my psyche
And battering my soul.

But God spoke to Elijah in the silence
As he sat hidden in his cave
Seeking asylum to save his life
A refugee from a murderous Queen.

How can I hear the silence
That is drowned by earthquake, wind and fire?

-EL

Reign of God

Introduction

Eschatology and question of the reign of God has been central to Moltmann's theology. He sees the reign of God as a future event that will one day be inaugurated. This focus raises the issue of whether God's future for the world be relegated to the future or are at least some elements are already present in the here and now. Is Moltmann's concept of anticipating the reign of God the only way in which humans can experience it today? What is said about the reign of God, both in terms of its location in time and in terms of its inclusivity, has major implications for the ways in which Christians relate to the world. Viewing the reign of God as a future event risks resignation with justice only coming in a distant future when God finally intervenes. What is it that we can say about the presence of God and the experience of God within our daily world? Somewhat more importantly, when will the reign of God be inaugurated in order to wipe away every tear?¹ Is the reign of God an event of the past, present or future and what relevance does this have for our experience of God in this world of suffering? Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates have differing perspectives on these questions, which reflect different understandings of how God is active in the world. This chapter will explore the differing ways in which Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates see the relationship of God to the world in terms of time of fulfilment of God's promises.

God on Earth

In the same way that the experiences of the Second World War caused Sölle to question the traditional image of God as powerful, it also drew her interest to the person of Christ. She reflects:

¹ Revelation 21:4

Like the rest of the theological generation in Europe to which I belong, I was stripped of a naive trust in the Father, Ruler, and Sustainer after two world wars. We fixed our gaze on Christ, the sufferer, because an innocent trust in God was no longer possible.²

The person of Christ who experienced all of what it was to be human, including what it was to suffer, became important to Sölle and it is hardly surprising that one of her earliest books is on Christology, *Christ the Representative*. Graham notes that in this book Sölle goes as far as to raise the question of the relevance of Jesus in the contemporary world.³ Sölle resolves this questioning by agreeing that Christ is relevant as a contrast to the image of a powerful God. The early theology of Sölle is focused on the person of Christ, virtually to the exclusion of God because of her rejection of the images of God as all-powerful.⁴ A traditional understanding of the events of the crucifixion are, according to Sölle, that of a magical, powerful and heroic Christ; instead she sees the actions of Jesus as demonstrating “the power of powerless love.”⁵ Sölle argues “in Christ God makes Godself vulnerable; in Christ, God defines God as nonviolent.”⁶ Thus Sölle not only sees Christ representing God to humanity, but also as representing humanity to God.⁷ According to Oliver, Sölle sees this as essential and without this representation of the powerlessness of humanity to God, there is a risk of God only being needed to fill the gaps.⁸ Indeed, Sölle goes as far as to suggest:

In Christ God himself left the immediacy of heaven, abandoned the security of home, forever. He mediated himself, went out from himself into unrecognisability, into non-differentiation. That this is God, he has in this way become unrecognisable, is the claim made by his player. The very God of power was played under conditions of helplessness.⁹

² Sölle. *Work & love*, p. 5

³ Graham. *Representation and substitution*, p. 27

⁴ Sölle. *Strength of the weak*, p. 98

⁵ Oliver, “Christ in the world,” p. 120

⁶ Sölle. *Window of vulnerability*, p. xi

⁷ Sölle. *Christ the representative*, p. 128

⁸ Oliver, “Christ in the world,” p. 115

⁹ Sölle. *Christ the representative*, p. 141

This powerlessness of Christ brings with it a point that was important for Sölle: Christ was not made to suffer, but rather to love and subsequently suffered because of that love.¹⁰ This view firmly rejects the image of Christ being forced to suffer the events of the crucifixion to appease a punishing God, but rather the crucifixion occurred because Christ demonstrated God's love for all people regardless of the personal consequences. Indeed, Sölle argues on multiple occasions that love is the only power which Christ had.¹¹ It is precisely because of this powerlessness in the traditional sense of power that, according to Sölle, the authorities did not recognise Jesus as the Christ. She suggests:

For those who mocked him [Jesus], God was identical with power and rules. But the only capital with which he came into the world was his love, and it was as powerless and as powerful as love is. He had nothing but his love with which to be in our hearts.¹²

One more point is important in Sölle's writing about the incarnation. Sölle argues that Christ is present not only in the church, but in the world at large. She reflects:

When I grew up I found that Christ is not only in the church. He lives and works in the world unobserved, is present where people's lives have become more real and free, and is crucified there where people's lives are in danger; and that has always been so. We can no longer ignore the presence of the "greater Christ" in the world, if we really believe that Christ died for all men.¹³

Thus, Sölle argues that Christ is present in the world and can be seen in the lives of all people regardless of whether they identify themselves as Christian. More particularly, Christ is seen in the face of all the suffering ones of the world and this presence of Christ in the poor and oppressed is regardless of their religious orientation. According to this view, Christians are unable to dismiss the suffering of any marginalised group of people, because to do so would be to dismiss the suffering of Christ.

¹⁰ Sölle. *War & love*, p. 94

¹¹ Oliver, "Christ in the world," p. 120

¹² Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 187

¹³ Sölle. *Truth*, p. 103

The Human One

Similarly to the image of God as powerful, Sölle also argues against “the image of God as an unmoved, fearless lord who needs no one in order to live... nothing has enticed [her] into theology as much as this conviction: God needs us.”¹⁴ This interrelatedness between humanity and God is central to Sölle’s theology. She frequently uses Theresa of Avila’s quote “God has not hands but ours”¹⁵ to reinforce the dependence of God on humanity.

A further aspect to Christ’s representation of God to humanity and humanity to God is the question of what it means for us to affirm that we are made in the image of God. Graham suggests that part of the image of God for Sölle is that “human being is relational being,”¹⁶ a concept which certainly is present in her writings. However, I would argue that there is more to Sölle’s definition of what it means to be made in the image of God. She explores this both as a feminist and as one advocating for the poor of the world. Following her experience in a black American church Sölle developed a new understanding of what beauty means:

The whole congregation, perhaps three thousand people, was involved [in affirming, “I am black, I am beautiful, I am to be respected, I am to be honoured]. I was sitting next to an old black woman, with wrinkled, work-worn hands. And now this old woman next to me said, “I am beautiful.” I think that for the first time I then understood what beauty is: this feeling of worth, of strength, of knowledge, of being grounded in human worth.¹⁷

It is this being grounded in human worth that is, in Sölle’s opinion, part of being made in the image of God. Both feminist and liberation theologies, according to Sölle, argue that God is reflected in all of humanity and not just the dominant part of society.¹⁸ Thus, for Sölle, the affirmation that humans are made in the image of God has to be

¹⁴ Sölle. *Mystery of death*, p. 113.

¹⁵ E.g. in *Ibid.*, p. 112

¹⁶ Graham. *Representation and substitution*, p. 60

¹⁷ Sölle. *Thinking about God*, p. 96

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50

about something more than about appearances suggesting instead that it relates to acting like God.¹⁹ This assertion is, of course, fraught with danger unless it is also remembered that (as discussed above) Sölle sees God as not a power of domination, but rather of love. The danger lies in the implications of the model of God as a power of domination. If this model is held up as the one for humanity to imitate, then there will always be the oppressed and oppressors. Affirming a model of God's power being that of love provides an ethic that seeks the best for all people. Sölle also links attaining the image of God with attaining the image of Christ;²⁰ the image of Christ being the image of the one who could only change lives through love.

God's future

Moltmann emphasises a future aspect of the reign of God on earth; yet, as we have seen in chapter eight, he does not allow this to become fatalistic or resigned into a perception that the future will only improve when the Parousia occurs. For Moltmann, God's very name, and hence God's nature, is one that draws creation to its future: "his name is a wayfaring name, a name of promise that discloses the new future, and the name whose truth is experienced in history inasmuch as promise discloses its future possibilities."²¹ Thus God's future opens up possibilities to humanity rather than closing them off; as Volf points out, it allows for new beginnings rather than the destruction of the old.²² Indeed the coming reign of God must, for Moltmann, be anticipated in the lives of humanity and in particular the human response to the suffering of others.²³ This renewal is for our current world and not a different one; it is a recreation.²⁴

¹⁹ Sölle and Steffensky. *Not just yes*, p. 52

²⁰ Sölle. *Suffering*, p. 131

²¹ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 30

²² Volf, "After Moltmann," p. 254-255

²³ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 330

²⁴ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 65

Moltmann argues that “God is the power of the future.”²⁵ It is through God’s presence that humanity is able to live differently rather than repeating history. This association of God with the hope for the future is, according to Moltmann, unique amongst world religions.²⁶ However, the future is not only from an abstracted idea, but rather, for Moltmann, it draws on the Jewish concept of Shekinah,²⁷ the dwelling of God with the people of Israel, particularly through their wanderings and later exile. Furthermore, he sees hope in eschatology as looking toward a future where “God is immediately and universally God.”²⁸ That God is present wherever the people are is also a sign that God’s future is attainable even when in exile.

At the same time that Moltmann affirms the anticipation of God’s future in the present creation, he also makes a distinction between the current world and the new creation. He suggests that:

In its [creation’s] future God will dwell in it with his essence. This is to say that the new creation corresponds to the essence of God and is illuminated and transfigured by God’s earthly presence.²⁹

Thus Moltmann sees a future where there will be a qualitative difference in relationship between humanity and God and this will lead to a qualitatively different relationship between people and between humanity and creation.³⁰ This change will come about as humanity learns to love each other and love creation. The vision of the potential future means that reality creates suffering because of the discrepancy between what is and what could be.³¹ As Bauckham argues, Moltmann sees “the *eschaton* is nothing less

²⁵ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 61

²⁶ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 87

²⁷ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 102

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, “Theology as eschatology,” in *The Future of hope: theology as eschatology* ed. Frederick Herzog (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 8

²⁹ Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 36

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61

³¹ *Ibid.*

than the new creation of all things,”³² and included in that is a new creation of the divine-human relationship.

Whilst Moltmann urges that the consequence of God anticipating God’s future is that humanity should do the same,³³ he also counsels caution that this anticipation by humanity is not the same as God’s in-breaking into history.³⁴ For Moltmann it is God, not human attempts or systems that will ultimately change the world in which we live. In many ways this is important as it counters the potential for people’s value to be based on their ability to work towards “self-redemption”.³⁵ As Bauckham points out, “For Moltmann, only God brings about his final Kingdom, and so the hopeful activity of people in history anticipates, but does not bring nearer the eschaton itself.”³⁶ By arguing that humanity is only able to anticipate the reign of God, Moltmann maintains a tension between words and grace, acknowledging the need for humanity to work towards a different future, but also maintaining the emphasis on God’s grace. Thus Moltmann’s theology is seen to have a practical emphasis rather than being removed from daily life.³⁷

In seeming contradiction to Moltmann’s focus on the future is his reference to history which he believes to be a “crucial factor [in theology that was] neglected in the Middle Ages.”³⁸ History is not for Moltmann events that are past and completed, but rather relates to remembrance and through that remembrance connects to hope.³⁹ It is because we can remember that God was active in history that we are able to hope that God will

³² Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 23

³³ Moltmann. *Future of creation*, p. 47

³⁴ Moltmann, "Theology as eschatology," p. 45

³⁵ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 338

³⁶ Bauckham. *Moltmann*, p. 3

³⁷ Bauckham. *Theology of Moltmann*, p. 6

³⁸ O'Donnell. *Trinity and temporality*, p. 145

³⁹ Moltmann, "Theology as eschatology," p. 19

act again in the future.⁴⁰ Similarly, in Moltmann's referring to "God of history", this involves affirming that God is active in the world and in particular in the suffering of the world.⁴¹ History also opens up the future; indeed, a new and different future is reliant on history.⁴²

Theology of Promise

For Moltmann, "the God of the promise"⁴³ is central to Christian faith and Christian hope. He sees this promise and fulfilment as being part of the name of God and hence, by extension, part of the very essence of who God is. Hence eschatology is an expectation of transformation of the world.⁴⁴ Moltmann argues that:

YHWH, as the name of the God who first of all promises his presence and his kingdom and makes them prospects for the future, is a God "the future as is the essential nature", a God of promise ... that discloses a new future, a name whose truth is experienced in history in as much as promise and of leaving the present to face the future, a God who is freedom is the source of new things that are to come.⁴⁵

The naming of God as such "tells us something 'about' God",⁴⁶ particularly about how Moltmann views God's nature and the ways in which God engages the world. This centrality of promise in Moltmann's theology is explored in detail by Morse, who suggests that "no one thesis is more fundamental to Moltmann's theology than the claim that the God of the Bible is revealed... in the form of promise."⁴⁷ This suggests that for Moltmann God is revealed and known through the promises and their fulfilment.

Yet for Moltmann, the divine promise is not an abstract concept: it was made concrete in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, which makes the promise universal "for the

⁴⁰ Müller-Fahrenholz. *Kingdom & power*, p. 50

⁴¹ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 77-78

⁴² Moltmann. *Religion*, p. 3

⁴³ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 267

⁴⁴ Moltmann, "Theology as eschatology," p. 36

⁴⁵ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 30

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 117

⁴⁷ Christopher Morse. *The logic of promise in Moltmann's theology*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 31

living and the dead and for the whole sighing creation.”⁴⁸ Such universality, or at least the potential for universal application, is essential for Moltmann as it means the promise is dependent on God rather than humanity’s ability to fulfil their covenant with God.⁴⁹ It is for this reason that God’s promise brings hope to humanity.⁵⁰

Kingdom of God

Perhaps central to the understanding of God is also the understanding of what it means for the reign of God to occur. Indeed, Moltmann himself argues that “the translations of *basilia tou theou* shift between the lordship or rule of God, and the kingdom of God. These translations also reflect theological interpretations,”⁵¹ with the former according to Moltmann reflecting the “rule of God in the present” and the latter “the new order of all things according to God’s precepts.”⁵² What is said about the reign of God reflects on how we view the nature of God. It is important at this point to explore what Moltmann’s concept of the Kingdom of God says about his understanding of God. The first element of the reign of God is that of inclusivity. He writes:

The Messiah will only come when *all* his guests have sat down at a common table, says a hopeful Jewish saying. Don’t Christians believe that Jesus the Messiah has come *in order that* all his guests can sit down at the same table? Why are we stopping them?⁵³

Thus, for Moltmann, not only will there be inclusion of all in the kingdom of God, this inclusivity is part of the nature of God. Moltmann sees this radical inclusivity demonstrated in the life and actions of Jesus. The accusations of Jesus associating with bad company were “rather that with these people, whom their society had rejected and pushed out, he was anticipating God’s messianic banquet with the nations.”⁵⁴ For

⁴⁸ Moltmann. *A broad place*, p. 102

⁴⁹ Moltmann. *Theology of hope*, p. 14

⁵⁰ Morse. *Logic of promise*, p. 37

⁵¹ Moltmann. *The way of Jesus Christ*, p. 97

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Moltmann. *Experiences of God*, p. 26-27

⁵⁴ Moltmann. *In the end*, p. 67

Moltmann, God does not exclude people but rather is inclusive of those whom mainstream society tends to reject. In this way, the reign of God is a creation that is “something *surprisingly* new, something which is not rooted in and does not rest upon the inherent potentialities and possibilities of the actual present, but on the capacities of ... God.”⁵⁵ The reign of God is therefore an extension of God’s grace.

Moltmann also affirms the nearness of the kingdom of God, as depicted in the preaching of Jesus according to the Gospels.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is so close that it can already be anticipated in the relationships present in the world.⁵⁷ Yet, at the same time, the kingdom of God is for Moltmann also a new beginning, where “justice, righteousness and peace” are present in a way that is not conceivable in this world.⁵⁸

Another element for Moltmann of the kingdom of God is that of the presence of God in the world⁵⁹. At the same time, Moltmann also argues that God is present among the victims of society,⁶⁰ and this is most effectively demonstrated in the “outcast Son of Man, who died between two wretches.”⁶¹ Thus, the reign of God subverts current political systems and looks with hope towards the inclusion of outcasts rather than those with political power. It is not a power-based reign, but rather one of inclusion of all humanity, where those who are currently marginalised are seen as central.

God alongside

Unlike Moltmann, the advocates had a primary image of God in the present; unlike Sölle the imagery was not limited to God in the poor and suffering. In particular, the metaphor for God which had meaning for several advocates was that of God walking

⁵⁵ Hart, "Imagination," p. 64

⁵⁶ Moltmann. *The way of Jesus Christ*, p. 97

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 89

⁵⁸ Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 23

⁵⁹ Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 82

⁶⁰ Moltmann. *God for a secular society*, p. 185

⁶¹ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 327

alongside them and supporting them, in much the same way as they supported asylum seekers. In many ways, this was a helpless image; they were able to make little practical difference in the lives of asylum seekers in detention, except that their presence and their treating of asylum seekers as fellow humans helped to find a glimmer of hope.

I think it's about being open to the unexpected and not actually being in control of the situation, just allowing things to happen as they do. And just the importance of hanging in with people and walking with them, one step at a time. It's a situation where I could not, I was powerless, I couldn't wave any magic wand and get them released from detention or get them justice, but just being with them, one step at a time. [Rev'd Susan]

In a similar way, Rev'd David reflected on his theology of hope and the presence of God in the difficulties of life. That God is present in life gave him hope although there may be a lack of awareness of God's presence. It is this understanding that God is with humanity which enabled Rev'd David to continue with his work with the detainees:

And I guess from including God in all of that by being aware that God is a God who, I often use with the people whom I work with, God is a God who sees, who hears, who knows, God is with us, God understands. God listens, God understands, God journeys with us, God never leaves us alone even though at times we don't feel like your prayers being answered. Even though at times we feel like we are alone.

Others were more specific about the duality of God's role with God's helplessness in bringing hope to the despairing. Rev'd Janice, herself a midwife, used the image of God as a midwife:

The thing about the midwife is that they don't actually do a whole lot. The woman does all the work but you're with the woman. So it's that image of the woman with another woman in the process of giving birth, so I guess that feeds into the sort of you're not alone, in fact, the promise is that we aren't alone and there'll be someone. Or "I will be with you." And so I think for me is, I want to make sure that nobody is alone.

Overall, God was seen as the support and basis of hope although, when coupled with the non-interventionalist view of God expressed by advocates, God could only be helpless

with the detainee. This concept of God being the one who supports humanity was expressed in a variety of ways:

[God is] Sort of like a ground of all being or supporter. Balance of life sort of image. [Margaret]

I think of a God who is open handed. You've got complete freedom, but you're on a solid base. So it's more that open hand image of God that always underpins everything. And you know even if you get to the edges, you're not going to fall off. [Rev'd Dorothy]

This concept of journeying with others not only related to the reflections of the advocates. Brenda told of an asylum seeker who, in spite of being compliant with the guards, was put into solitary confinement in a management unit because he had asked the guards to be gentle with a detainee who was having a difficult time. Brenda said:

So I rang him and talked to him on the phone and he described what it was like. They were in a room, had one hour out a day, with a dirty mattress on the floor with a blanket and pillow. No other stimulation, with cameras on you all the time. His faith sounded so strong, and he seemed his inner strength that he had, he said, "I'm glad I'm having this experience" because he felt a real closeness to God and his own faith was strengthened by this experience. Instead of being angry about it, he was sort of feeling, "I'm glad I'm having this experiencing because it's something that's strengthening me and a lot of others have been through."

She then related how the experience of being in the management unit assisted the asylum seeker to have more empathy with other detainees who were in solitary confinement more regularly. Thus, God's presence on the journey of life brings hope, even when it does not always change the reality in the here and now. Other advocates agreed with this perception:

I guess that hope means for me when the situation looks hopeless there is a sense or a sign or a belief that this is not the end. This is not how it ultimately is, even if the worst comes to the worst, you hold out hope that you are actually making a journey with the Spirit of God even if you can't see that happening. [Rev'd Joan]

However, it must be noted that whilst the concept of God's support does not necessarily mean that the situation will change, this does not give permission for passivity in seeking to change the situation.

The experience of the presence of God was also particularly important to advocates. As previously mentioned, almost all of the advocates who visited detention centres experienced God there in spite of the inhumanity of the situation. For some of the asylum seekers who converted to Christianity, this presence, made real by the presence of the advocates, was one of the key factors in their decision:

I said to these guys, why do you want to become a Christian? And one of the interesting things they said was that it was because of what I'd been doing on the residents' committee. They said, "You were the person who was always there and always speaking up for us, so we thought there had to be something with this Christianity with this person always there advocating for us." [Rev'd Susan]

Although asylum seekers on occasions expressed that it was advocates who brought God into the situation, it is also worth noting that advocates themselves did not see this as the case. For advocates, God was already present in the detention centres and their role was in making God more obvious.

God was already there when we got there. You could see God's spirit at work in some of the people. [Rev'd Lyn]

Naturally, in the midst of the suffering experienced in the detention centres there were times where God felt remote or even absent. Yet for advocates there was always the knowledge that God was there. Charles expressed this confidence of the presence of God, even when he could not feel it:

In that case all you could hope for was that if he did get deported, he wouldn't be killed and the rest of it. It's like a war situation, isn't it? All you can say is God is there, no matter what, but it can be pretty awful. And it's hard to have hope in some of those times. You hope the people that are going through that feel the presence of God in some way in their lives. And just with that you could be there to hold their hands and share some of your own trust in God, if you like.

Rev'd Tom agreed that his doubts related to him personally, not to his relationship with God:

In the same way, I don't think I've ever seriously doubted God's existence. I've had moments where I've wondered, but I've never had serious doubts. Because it's what makes my life make sense. I think probably I've just imbued so much that God's presence in my life is just so much of who I am. So sometimes you ask questions about who you are and so on. But I've never had serious doubts about God's existence.

On other occasions, although there was the suffering, experiencing God's presence in the detention centres was quite tangible.

God was there. God was actually right there, beside us, and within us, and agonising over their condition in the same ways that we were. It was a sort of unity, I guess, in a way that we just felt we couldn't have coped. [Rev'd Helen]

For some advocates, God was not only seen in the niceness of the relationships or even the grace given to them, but rather in the suffering that was experienced by asylum seekers themselves:

In a way, I saw him in the suffering, I think, because Jesus also suffered, you know, and was prepared to suffer and I was powerless too in many ways. So I think it was there. I think I saw it also in the caring of a lot of people, because there's a lot of people who have given a lot of themselves to care for refugees. [Bonnie]

The Reign on Earth

Moltmann, Sölle and the advocates all located God's time differently. The advocates focused on God in the present and scarcely spoke about the reign of God, although this may have been because of the questions that were asked.⁶² Another rationale for this lack of inclusion about the reign of God may have been that advocates saw traditional concepts of the reign of God as relating to an "interventionalist" God creating a physical empire on earth which they had already rejected. However, at least some advocates were likely to have been exposed to other images of the reign of God. It must of course

⁶² However, it must also be noted that other concepts, such as prayer were first brought up by the advocates and only when this seemed to be a common theme, questions about prayer were added into the interviews.

be acknowledged that other models of the immanence of God are possible without resorting to a God who intervenes; some of these were explored in chapter 14. Advocates, however, explored the experiences of God's presence even in the depth of suffering and did talk about concepts connected with it. On the other hand, Moltmann looks towards God's reign as a future event, whereas Sölle like the advocates saw it occurring in the here and now. Because of this, Sölle speaks little about God in time, but she appears to have an underlying assumption that the reign of God is realised where humanity works for justice and true peace.

As has been mentioned in chapter nine, Moltmann explicitly separates human action from the in-breaking of God's reign in the world. It must be reiterated once again that Moltmann does not use this separation to argue against the need for human action to correct unjust systems, but rather he recognises the limitations of human systems and that even the most idealistic systems throughout history have quickly turned to oppressive or corrupt regimes in their own ways.⁶³ Hence, for Moltmann, the reign of God is a future event that may be anticipated but is not realised in the present.

Moltmann's perspective has the advantage of not absolutising any human system as being the reign of God on earth; hence the power games that such theocracies would entail are minimised.⁶⁴ Where regimes claim to be creating the reign of God on earth, opposition to those regimes are equated with opposition to God and hence heresy. However, if it is acknowledged that the reign of God is a future event which God brings about, then no human being can claim that his or her system of society is the implementation of God's reign on earth.

Yet the weakness of Moltmann's point of view is that it is possible to read it as disempowering human activity that seeks to promote a just society. If only God is able

⁶³ Moltmann. *Crucified God*, p. 317ff

⁶⁴ Moltmann explores some of the practical implications of theocracies in Moltmann. *The trinity*, p. 195ff

to bring about the just society called the Kingdom of God, then why will human activity make any difference? Indeed, read without Moltmann's advocacy for social justice, Moltmann's eschatology is easily translated into such a theology. It is also possible to read Moltmann's theology as weakening the call for social justice because, instead of having a rationale of bringing about the reign of God, acts of social justice are generated by one of three rationales – the Old Testament laws concerning justice, recognition of the common humanity or imitation of Christ. For some Christians this will raise questions about the call to justice: namely if salvation is by grace alone, why do justice? Whilst I must reiterate that I do not believe this to be Moltmann's intention, it is, as has already been noted, a possible interpretation of Moltmann's theology.

On the other hand, whilst Sölle acknowledges the need for seeing the reign of God in the future,⁶⁵ this is in the context of warning against the “brash and confident Messianism which makes *pogroms* and courts of inquisition possible.”⁶⁶ Rather, Sölle is more focused on deconstructing the view of the reign of God that is otherworldly and allows for non-engagement in justice because of expecting God to rescue humanity.⁶⁷ However, for much of Sölle's work, “the kingdom of God is lived here and now.”⁶⁸ Thus, like the advocates, Sölle sees the reign of God being enacted in those who work towards justice.⁶⁹

The view of Sölle and the advocates has strengths and weaknesses which are virtually opposite to Moltmann's. It is a call to action within the society in no uncertain terms; one can hardly misunderstand it, as Moltmann's views can be misunderstood, as an excuse not to engage in the doing of justice. However, it does open up the possibility of being misused to enshrine particular systems which can become abusive.

⁶⁵ Sölle. *Christ the representative*, p. 110

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Naudé and Sölle. *Hope for faith*, p. 13

⁶⁸ Sölle and Steffensky. *Not just yes*, p. 49

⁶⁹ Sölle. *Silent cry*, p. 54

However, the concept of the reign of God needs further exploration. Is it enough to affirm with Moltmann that God brings about the reign of God at some future date and that humanity needs to anticipate it in the here and now? Whilst the concept is commendable, to me, such a view begs the question of why the anticipation is necessary if ultimately the responsibility for mending the world is in God's hands. Its logical conclusion is still an "interventionalist" God, which raises the question of why such a God does not prevent the massive suffering which both occurs naturally and is inflicted by other humans. If God is one day going to bring about the reign of God, then the question still remains as to why the suffering is allowed to continue in the here and now. The question must be raised as to how to develop an adequate theology holding these two elements in balance so that it gives hope for those suffering now without having the potential to cause further suffering in the future through a misuse of power. Perhaps then, a return to the Gospel proclamation of "the kingdom of God has come near"⁷⁰ can offer some thoughts towards reconciliation of the two. New Testament scholars assert that "Jesus saw... signs that God's rule was already asserting itself,"⁷¹ signs that are visible in the changes which occur in people's lives.⁷² This suggests that it is in the changes to ordinary lives that the reign of God is made manifest, particularly when outcasts are included into society and the poor have enough to eat.

If this line of reasoning is taken further, then it is in the actions that promote inclusion, rather than any particular system that can be put into place, where the reign of God is experienced in the world. In this way, the reign of God is constantly near and generating hope; the experience of God *is* at hand, yet no one system can lay claim to

⁷⁰ E.g. Mark 1:15

⁷¹ William R. G. Loader. *Jesus and the fundamentalism of his day*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 65

⁷² Ibid., p. 65

being the system that is required. By focusing on action as bringing about the reign of God, the need for social justice is also maintained.

An argument which could be raised against such a viewpoint affirming the Gospel call to social action is that justification occurs by grace alone. Two comments can respond to this. Firstly, in forgiving people, Jesus did on occasions respond with the injunction to “sin no more.”⁷³ If the injunction to not commit further sin is taken seriously and the definition of sin includes structural elements, such as that which causes poverty, as is agreed to by Moltmann and Sölle, then social justice becomes the imperative for Christians. In responding to the command to sin no more, there is the need not only to reform the individualistic elements of sin, but also to make the decision to reverse the social sins that occur in society. Secondly, this engagement in social justice does not arise out of rules and regulations which require such action to be taken, but is in response to love. Love for humanity and creation is the response of Christians to the experience of God’s grace. As Moltmann reminds us:

In love, resurrection is not merely expected; it is already experienced. For love makes us come alive. And love never give anyone or anything up for lost. It sees a future in which God will restore everything, and put everything to rights, and gather everything into his kingdom.⁷⁴

Part of this not giving up on others is to seek a better life for the other, particularly when our actions are part of what is causing the suffering for the beloved. When such actions are taken to alleviate the suffering of the other, then the reign of God is anticipated and even is at hand.

Sölle reminds her readers of the need for social justice by drawing on the reflections of Theresa of Avilla when she wrote:

⁷³ For example in the case of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11)

⁷⁴ Moltmann. *Jesus Christ*, p. 4

Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.⁷⁵

This starting point acknowledges the need for human action in developing a just world and challenging systems and situations which oppress and marginalise other people. At the same time, I believe it guards against the view that humanity can change the world without God, a view which is often the opposite of the eschatological view of the reign of God.

The limitations of human attempts to inaugurate the reign of God must also be acknowledged. The potential for corruption of the ideal is a constant danger, and throughout history, where people have attempted to establish an earthly kingdom of God, the attempts have failed.⁷⁶ Thus by necessity, the concept of the reign of God must refer to something broader than simply a physical location and its governing rules. The concept of being the hands of Christ was illustrated by Rev'd Tom when reflecting on the Lord's Prayer he said:

My other, I've got so many favourites, but the multiplication of loaves and fishes. It's been very important in aid and development work as well and that combined with the give us this day our daily bread. We can only say those words with integrity where we're following Christ's example and making bread available to the hungry.

This model of enacting the reign of God was also reflected by Kathleen as she spoke about prayer:

[Prayer is] holding before people hope and vision. And I guess if you pray and hold things in front of you, you're more likely to remember and do things. So I'm not one for praying that Betty will feel that God loves and cares for her unless I'm going to go and do it, or organise for someone else to go and do it.

⁷⁵ Attributed to St Theresa, Oxford Reference Online, <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t115.e2908&srn=1&ssid=518352145#FIRSTHIT>

⁷⁶ Early communism is one example of the failure of such utopian dreams to reach reality.

Regardless of how the concept of the reign of God is articulated or the language that is used to express it, it is of vital importance that it does encourage humanity to work in the here and now towards a more just and equitable world. Perhaps then it is also right to affirm multiple theologies of the reign of God so that no one model becomes dominant and, through its dominance, corrupted. Similarly, a variety of language needs to be used so that metaphors do not become idols and images are not rigidly applied.

Conclusion



What is hope?

Imagine a rubbish tip;
The sort you see on TV
In an impoverished country
With kids picking their way across the mounds
That smoke with poisonous air
Burning its way into the polluted atmosphere,
In the sort of documentary that turns the stomach imagining the smell
Or leads the more kindly among us
To condescendingly reflect
“There but for the grace of God go I.”

Naked kids in poverty
Scratching out a living
From the throw-away lives of the rich
Hunting down scraps of food
Or scraps of anything that can be sold.

Imagine the smell,
The toxins,
The infected sores
On scratched knees,
The poverty,
The grind.

This is not hope.

Now imagine in a polluted corner of the tip
A small and insignificant flower
Almost hidden by the piles of rubbish
Struggling to survive,
Struggling to bloom;
A tiny blossom of beauty.

This is hope.

-EL

Conclusion

Where is God in the face of suffering? In this thesis, I have listened to people who have supported those who suffered deeply, and searched for ways to identify how theological understanding of suffering and hope can be expanded by the lived experience of those familiar with it. From their reflections I have been able to identify key aspects in which our contemporary Western theology of suffering and hope needs further development. This has been in conjunction with an examination of the theologies of Moltmann and Sölle, the only two Western authors who have consistently written on the topic.¹ I have therefore analysed their work as representing the major contribution to contemporary theology on the topic. However, though many of the themes identified in this thesis have been explored by various Western theologians including Moltmann and Sölle, they appear not to have done so within the context of suffering and hope.

My journey through this thesis has led me to explore the question of an authentic theology of suffering and hope on a number of paths. In doing so, it has also given me an insight into the extent and effect of trauma arising from suffering deliberately inflicted onto a group of people by a harsh regime, in this case as a consequence of the incarceration of refugees and asylum seekers in Australian immigration detention centres. It was a journey that showed me the depths of suffering experienced by my fellow humans, though it did also offer glimmers of hope. How then to draw together these many and varied insights on suffering, hope and the nature of God?

Suffering is, of course, a part of life for many people and comes in many different forms, labelled as physical, mental and emotional, but often interconnected. Those who

¹ See Methodology

have experienced suffering in all its forms will have particular insights that can test and expand our theology. Suffering is also central to the Christian story as represented by the image of Jesus suffering on the cross. At the centre of the Christian religion is a person who knew what it was to suffer not only in his own personal life, but also within a social context of living in a country enduring great oppression and as part of a race of people who saw their identity as having arisen as a consequence of times within history.

In spite of this centrality of suffering to the Judeo-Christian story and to his own social context, as we have seen in chapter five, Moltmann's theological writing focuses mainly on hope. However, in the course of this research it has become clear that, with some members of our community such as asylum seekers having experienced on-going and pointless suffering, there is a need for Western theologians to write about the depths of suffering without either being overwhelmed by despair or moving too quickly to uphold hope. The biblical tradition of lament fulfils this in that it not only reminds us of the need to name the suffering occurring and the injustice associated with it but also allows us to speak openly and honestly towards God without fear.

When suffering is being deliberately inflicted on people, the question arises as to the nature of sin and evil in the world, an issue which was explored in chapter six. Instead of looking at sin in terms of humans being inherently sinful or unable to control their actions, I have drawn on Gary's concept of fermented good to explore the nature of sin. When God's good gifts of the cosmos are misused, there is the propensity for them to ferment into evil. However, unlike fermentation in a literal sense, this process can stop or even be reversed almost as if there is a dimension of Spirit which moves within life for 'good'. Where humans are open to such a different way of being, changes can occur which work against the evil that has been perpetrated. Sometimes this has impact for the individuals involved; at other times it can create systemic change and have broader implications for how society functions.

In response to recognising the existence of evil in the world, the question must be raised as to what the Christian response should be. Whilst authors do write about the need for social justice, neither Moltmann nor Sölle actually develop a theology for dealing with inhumane systems. The advocates, on the other hand, have simply got on with the job of living in a counter-cultural way, without necessarily reflecting on any theological basis. As we have seen (chapter seven), advocacy and subversive acts against abusive systems have biblical underpinnings and therefore should be central to how Christians act out their faith in the world. Indeed, without further developing such a theology, Christianity is in danger of being only relevant for the privileged of the world. Yet early Christian theology developed initially from the experience of a persecuted community. Therefore it would appear that communities of people who are suffering in our own day and those who support them have particularly valuable insights for informing contemporary Christian theology. The integration of such understanding allows, indeed encourages, individuals and groups to live in a way that is counter to unjust systems of the world.

When suffering is encountered, even in the face of Christian hope there can be no quick movement from the experience of suffering to that of transformation or resurrection. Whilst perhaps hope longs for a different outcome, there is also the waiting time of unknowing and this too must be acknowledged in Christian theology. For those in the detention centres, there was an enforced waiting time whilst they were locked away for months and more frequently years. Grieving takes time and, although hope may arise, this is not instant nor is it an automatic result. The waiting is an important time in dealing with suffering and this needs to be acknowledged for people who are in the midst of such experiences. It is important to acknowledge the reality of loss and grief and anger in order for such events to be incorporated into future growth. Hope cannot be a true hope unless time is allowed to feel the grief associated with traumatic events.

The imagery of Easter Saturday (chapter eight), a time of waiting, gives a starting point for theological reflection on the meaning of that waiting time.

Whilst this waiting space in suffering must be acknowledged, it is the reality of hope which forms an integral part of the Christian faith. This is neither the hope of escapism nor an individualistic hope, as has often been interpreted, but rather the hope for a changed situation where suffering is overcome. At the same time, this hope is not limited to those who are suffering, but, as seen in chapter nine, is important for those who support the suffering ones of the world. This was seen in the real need for advocates to maintain their sense of hope in the face of the trauma they experienced whilst visiting the detention centres and turned out to be particularly so for those who continue to experience trauma symptoms several years after their visits ceased. Christian hope calls the privileged and able to stand alongside the oppressed and suffering ones as they work together towards a future of justice and peace for all people. It holds up a vision of a future that is different from the one being experienced in the here and now, and calls people to find a way towards that future.

This recognition of a future involving justice also arises from the recognition that all people are made in the image of God. In chapter ten, we saw how by developing relationships with asylum seekers and refugees, advocates crossed boundaries implemented by society and lived lives that affirmed detainees as also being the beloved of God. This affirmation, from the earliest pages of the biblical text recognises the common connections between people, even when race, culture or other aspects may seem to divide. In the gospels, this theme is further developed, arguing that not only are all people made in God's image, but also that all are the beloved of God. Recognition of this connection helps break the cycle of violence and means that neither the victims nor abusers become dehumanised. Instead, it seeks to build up relationships which in turn become the catalyst for change. Without descending into an individualistic

interpretation of religion, such a theological framework affirms that God cares for each person and knows people individually, which is a cause for hope in itself. Affirming that all people are the beloved of God changes the relationship between people and calls for action to amend the situation for both the oppressed and oppressors. It recognises everything that would make people less than human and seeks to overcome those barriers. This action both acts out the hope for the world and also brings hope to those who are entrapped in situations of oppression.

A further response to this recognition of the other as the beloved of God is developed in chapter eleven highlighting the role of compassion. Compassion was central to the life and ministry of Jesus and, whilst in the gospel stories it typically leads to action, there are times when being in solidarity with another is the only possible outcome. The difference that can be made by compassionate solidarity was highlighted by advocates who could rarely make a practical difference in the lives of asylum seekers. However, it was their compassionate solidarity which broke down the sense of isolation so often experienced in times of suffering and which in itself can increase the suffering experienced. Compassion is a willingness to be with another in the depths of pain and to experience that pain as fully as possible. Hope is generated through the relationship and reduced isolation. In hope and with compassion, suffering people are seen as subjects with self-determination rather than being objects of pity or charity. By so doing, their humanity is maintained and recognised by others. Whilst compassion does not necessarily make much practical difference to suffering ones or alleviate the situation, it does assist people to maintain hope.

An added factor in this interaction is the dynamic of forgiveness which becomes an act of hope that can only be initiated by those who have been offended against. Forgiveness allows the victim to move beyond being a victim and it acknowledges the perpetrator as being human. As one refugee said in chapter twelve, forgiveness

involves handing the hurts over to God because it is not humanly possible to deal with the situation. As in the recognition of the humanity of all people, so too forgiveness can work to break the cycle of violence and bring about creative solutions to conflict. Whilst ideally it enables reconciliation, it must be recognised that this cannot always occur, often for practical reasons; however an inability to gain reconciliation need not be a barrier to forgiveness. Also, where there has been trauma for the victim, having flashbacks from the events of suffering does not necessarily mean that forgiveness has not occurred. Rather, flashbacks are seen as a result of the trauma and forgiveness as part of the healing process, but not the whole part. Forgiveness has an integral role to play in generating hope through the healing that it brings, potentially to both sides of the conflict. It deals with the past situation to enable the victim to look towards the future and no longer be a victim of others' actions.

However, questions still remain as to insights regarding the nature of God in a suffering world. As discussed in chapter thirteen, rather than being transcendently separate from creation or an unfeeling being, as the word "impassible" implies, God is imminently present and suffering alongside those who suffer. As was acknowledged by many advocates, God was not only present in the detention centres but was also suffering with asylum seekers; regardless of whether or not advocates visited the centres, God was there. That such recognition of God present becomes a catalyst in itself, inviting human response, is a key part of gospel tradition. This is perhaps most clearly named in Matthew 25 where Christ is made visible in those who are suffering, not because suffering has some mystically transformative power that is good in itself but rather because of the compassion expressed at both human and divine levels as affirmed in verse 40 "just as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me." This also presents an image of God as being vulnerable and relying on assistance from humans rather than as the all-powerful divine image more familiar in theology. This immanent

sense of Immanuel, God-with-us, affirms that rather than suffering being seen as a sign of separation from God, there is a renewed closeness to God even if that is not experienced at the time. God therefore not only becomes a companion but also holds the hope for suffering humans.

Arising out of this understanding comes a multiplicity of ways for speaking about God, and some of these are explored in chapter fourteen. Whilst perhaps the traditional way of speaking of God as “Father, Son and Spirit” are labels into which other names for God can be classified. Contemporary human experiences of God and modern metaphors used for God also have validity. What is more important than the actual images used is to explore the truth or meaning contained within them. For instance, images such as “advocate” and “midwife” arose out of the detention centre context as having meaning when describing the nature of God. If this broadening of images can be done in an attitude of listening to people with a variety of experiences, then our understanding of God can be broadened in new ways.

Finally, it is also important to ask questions about the timing and nature of the “Reign of God” and how this relates to hope. These two interrelated questions are explored in chapters fifteen and sixteen. We have seen how Moltmann asserted the need to anticipate the future reign of God and the problems this raises. However, the view that humans are active in bringing about God’s kingdom has serious risks, particularly when seen in the context of such theology having been used as divine justification for empirical and monarchical systems. A different way of viewing the reign of God is to see that it is when love breaks in through lives that the reign of God is near. Whilst this still relies on human action and response, the focus on the response to love and show compassion guards against the corruption possible from focusing on rules and regulations. It also develops a strengthening of the rationale to “anticipate” the reign of God which becomes both a now and future reality.

As has been seen throughout this thesis, my methodology of drawing on phenomenology can be used to further explore theology and to open up areas of reflection which are not necessarily apparent from any one person's experience. Phenomenology allows for a systematic listening to the experiences of other people and thus can be used to broaden out the range of experiences on which a theologian can systematically reflect. Given that experience is an inherent part of hermeneutics and theological reflection, it is important not to limit the scope of such reflection by the experiences in which any one person can engage. Indeed, in using social research methods, one aims to put aside one's own experiences and preconceptions, as much as possible, in order to truly listen to the concerns and meta-stories raised by those who have experienced phenomena being studied. This means that whilst few Western theologians may actually live in situations of poverty or oppression, like the communities for whom the New Testament was written, they can use the lived experience of poverty and oppression to re-examine their theologies. In doing so, extra depths and perspectives are revealed from that which we in the Western world would otherwise be able to see. In the case of this research project, not only did the use of phenomenology in theological reflection identify areas in which further theological thinking is required, but it also contributed towards the conclusions drawn. As in theological reflection and the hermeneutical circle, there is a critical dialogue between experience and tradition in order to open up a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. Neither experience nor tradition are the sole measure of interpretation, rather they each inform the other. This methodology gives Western theologians a new tool with which to explore issues of theology.

I have used phenomenology because I believe the true test case for any theology is how it speaks to people at the extremes of human experience. If our theologies of suffering and hope have little meaning for people who are experiencing suffering, then I must

question whether it is a valid interpretation. Of course historically when theologians have witnessed suffering for themselves, their experience has led them to explore more deeply their understanding of God in a world of suffering, for example after the Lisbon earthquake or the Second World War. Using phenomenology to listen deeply to the experience of suffering merely takes this experiential reflection and allows us to evaluate our theology against such a standard and identify issues that need to be explored further.

The more I read about suffering and hope, the more convinced I become that there cannot be any solution to the problem of suffering for as soon as one is given the status of “correct,” it becomes abusive to those whose experiences do not fit. Thus the chapters on the various aspects of suffering and hope aim not to provide a solution, but to show my reflections on the topic – based on the lived experience of those who have experienced suffering. They also aim to provide a catalyst for opening up the reflections of other people when considering their understandings of suffering and hope in relation to God.

It must be said that each of these chapters represents an area in which theological discussion needs to continue. The connection between these concepts of suffering and hope has been given little thought by contemporary theologians and what can be said in the space of this thesis is really an introduction to the issues involved. As the world situation changes, theologies of suffering and hope must be reconsidered once again in order to remain relevant and to learn from the insights provided by other disciplines. This is not to say that theology is at the whim of the world, but rather that each new generation must theologically reflect rather than relying solely on the answers of the past. Naturally, some answers will remain the same and others will change. After events of great suffering, it is to be expected that new insights will arise and understandings will change.

However, by testing theology against the experiences of suffering, one important point is affirmed, namely that God and hope have meaning and relevance to people in the depths of despair. Even when faced with deliberately inflicted suffering, God and hope can be and indeed are present with glimpses being witnessed in the daily lives and relationships that occur. Such life-giving dynamic sees flowers appearing despite the struggle to survive; and one day, the desert shall bloom.



Information for Advocates

Information Letter

Project Title: Speaking rightly of God in a suffering world

Investigator (s) Prof. Trish Harris
 Rev'd Dr Alex Jensen
 Ms Elaine Ledgerwood

Contact Person Elaine Ledgerwood
Address 210 Surrey Road, Rivervale
Telephone No. (08) 9470 9519

I am a PhD student in theology and am interested in learning about how the experience of working with refugees has shaped your Christian faith. I would like to hear your life stories and your reflections on your faith. From this, I will be looking at how Western theologians talk about the same issues examine if there is a connection between academic theology and lived experience and if not to explore the question of how we speak rightly of God in a suffering world. To do this I am conducting interviews with Christians who have supported refugees in detention or on a temporary protection visa and you are invited to participate in an interview. To participate, you will preferably have had a friendship/connection with individual refugees.

What Does Your Participation Involve?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to be available approximately two hours of interviews. This can be done in up to three sessions, depending on what would suit you. During the course of these interviews you will be asked about what you did to support refugees, if and how this has affected your faith or understanding of God, what biblical (or other images helped you cope with your work and if there is a message that you would like to give to the wider church.

It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. There will be no consequences to you if you decide not to participate. If you decide to discontinue participation at any time, you may do so without providing an explanation. All information will be treated in a confidential manner, and your name will not be used in any publication arising out of the research. All of the research will be kept in a locked cabinet.

I would like to arrange the interviews at a place where you feel comfortable. In most cases this will be your home, but the location is up to you. Because the interviews will be audio taped, it will need to be a reasonably quiet place.

Possible Benefits

I hope the research enables you to have the chance to share your stories in a supportive environment. I will simply be listening to your stories and asking questions; there will be no judgement involved in the interviewing process. We will also be using a process called "theological reflection" which links images and stories from the bible to

your story to help search for meaning. This is a process that many Christians find useful in dealing with life events and you might find it useful to use on other occasions.

Possible Risks

If you experienced the symptoms of trauma while you were working with refugees, this may recur through the interviewing process. I have arranged for ministers and chaplains from several denominations to be available to give you support if you would like this.

Questions

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact me, Elaine Ledgerwood on ph 0412 143 498 (email e.ledgerwood@ecu.edu.au) or Prof Trish Harris on ph 9360 2252. Either of us would be happy to discuss any aspect of the research with you. Once we have analysed the information we will be mailing you a summary of our findings. You are welcome to contact us at that time to discuss any issue relating to the research study.

Contact

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about your concerns you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au

You can expect to receive feedback early next year.

We would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this research project. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Ledgerwood

Appendix II:

Consent Form

Speaking rightly of God in a suffering world

Participant

I have read the participant information sheet, which explains the nature of the research and the possible risks. The information has been explained to me and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep.

I am happy to be interviewed and for the interviews to be audio recorded as part of this research. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to and that I can withdraw at any time without consequences to myself.

I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used. I have also been informed that I may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher unless required to do so by law.

Signature of Participant

Date

Chief Investigator

I have fully explained to _____ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Print Name

Position

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